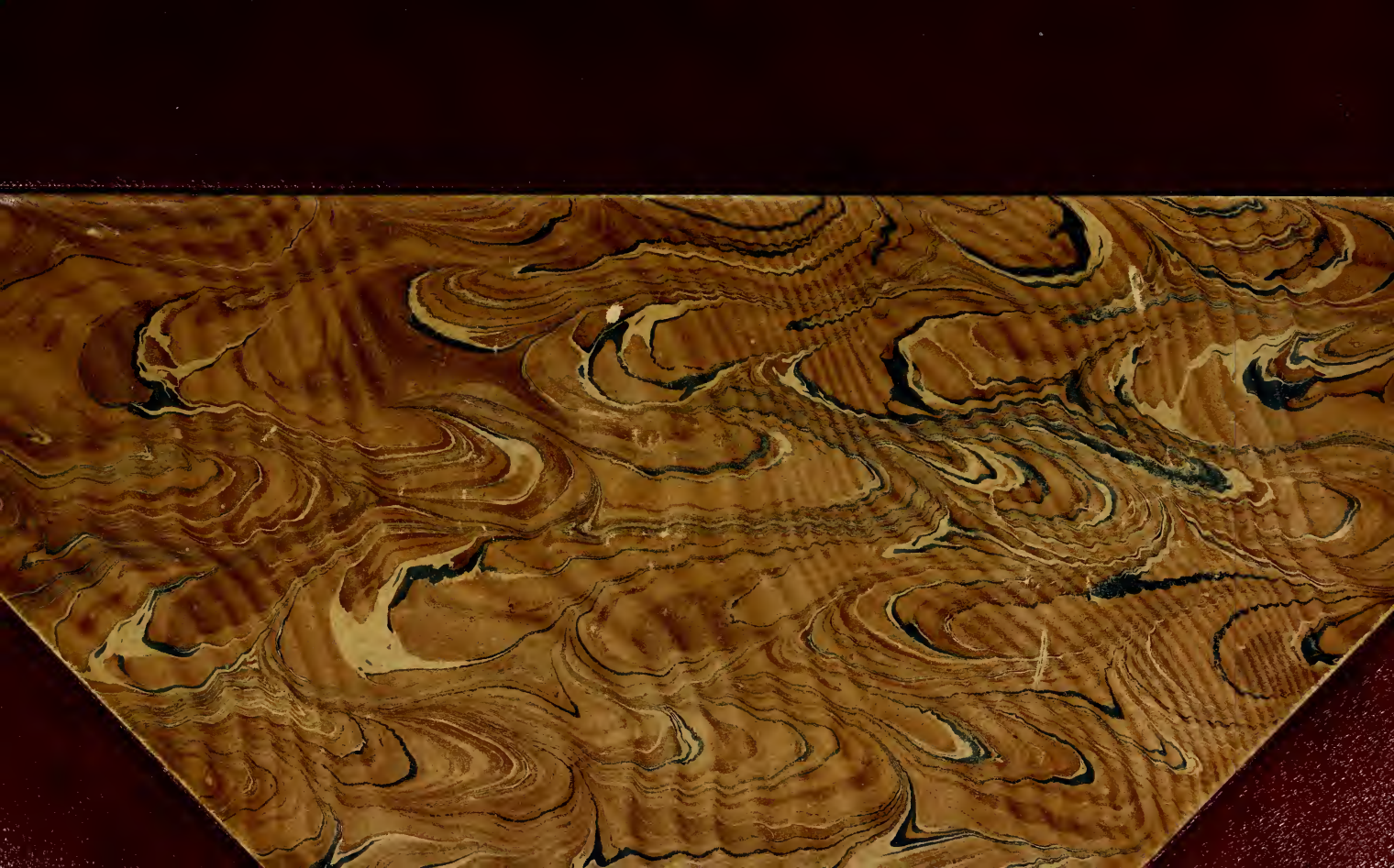

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GRIFFITH GAUNT

Or, JEALOUSY

PEG WOFFINGTON

A Novel

BY

CHARLES READE, D. C. L.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
COLONIAL PRESS COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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GRIFFITH GAUNT.

CHAPTER I.

"Then I say once for all, that priest shall never darken my doors again."

"Then I say they are my doors and not yours, and that holy man shall brighten them whenever he will."

The gentleman and lady, who faced each other, pale and furious, and interchanged this bitter defiance, were man and wife. And had loved each other well.

Miss Catherine Peyton was a young lady of ancient family in Cumberland, and the most striking, but least popular, beauty in the county. She was very tall and straight, and carried herself a little too imperiously; yet she would sometimes relax and all but dissolve that haughty figure, and hang sweetly drooping over her favorites: then the contrast was delicious, and the woman fascinating.

Her hair was golden and glossy; her eyes a lovely gray; and she had a way of turning them on slowly and full, so that their victim could not fail to observe two things: 1st, That they were grand and beautiful orbs; 2d, that they were thoughtfully overlooking him instead of looking at him.

So contemplated by glorious eyes, a man feels small and bitter.

Catherine was apt to receive the blunt compliments of the Cumberland squires with this sweet, celestial, superior gaze, and for this, and other imperial charms, was more admired than liked.

The family estate was entailed on her brother; her father spent every farthing he could; so she had no money, and no expectations, except from a distant cousin, Mr. Charlton, of Hernshaw Castle and Bolton Hall.

Even these soon dwindled: Mr. Charlton took a fancy to his late wife's relation, Griffith Gaunt, and had him into his house, and treated him as his heir. This disheartened two admirers who had hitherto sustained Catherine Peyton's gaze, and they retired. Comely girls, girls long-nosed but rich, girls snub-nosed but winning, married on all sides of her, but the imperial beauty remained Miss Peyton at two-and-twenty.

She was rather kind to the poor; would give them money out of her slender purse, and would even make clothes for the women, and sometimes read to them (very few of them could read to themselves in that day). All she required in return was that they should be Roman Catholics, like herself, or at least pretend they might be brought to that faith by little and little.

She was a high-minded girl; and could be a womanly one — whenever she chose.

She hunted about twice a week in the season, and was at home in the saddle, for she had ridden from a child; but so ingrained was her character, that this sport, which more or less unsexes most women, had no perceptible effect on her mind nor even on her manners. The scarlet riding-habit, and little purple cap, and the great white bony horse she rode, were often seen in a good place at the end of a long run: but, for all that, the lady was a most ungenial fox-huntress; she never spoke a word but to her acquaintances, and wore a settled air of dreamy

indifference, except when the hounds happened to be in full cry, and she galloping at their heels. Worse than that, when the hounds were running into the fox, and his fate certain, she had been known to rein in her struggling horse, and pace thoughtfully home, instead of coming in at death, and claiming the brush.

One day being complimented, at the end of a hard run, by the gentleman who kept the hounds, she turned her celestial orbs on him and said, "Nay, Sir Ralph, I love to gallop; and this sorry business it gives me an excuse."

It was full a hundred years ago: the country teemed with foxes; but it abounded in stiff coverts, and a knowing fox was sure to run from one to another; and then came wearisome efforts to dislodge him; and then Miss Peyton's gray eyes used to explore vacancy, and ignore her companions, biped and quadruped.

But one day they drew Yewtree Brow and found a stray fox. At Gaylad's first note he broke cover and went away for home across the open country. A hedger saw him steal out, and gave a view-halloo; the riders came round helter-skelter; the hounds in cover one by one threw up their noses and voices; the horns blew, the canine music swelled to a strong chorus, and away they swept across country, — dogs, horses, men; and the deuce take the hindmost.

It was a gallant chase, and our dreamy virgin's blood got up. Erect, but lithe and vigorous, and one with her great white gelding, she came flying behind the foremost riders, and took leap for leap with them; one glossy, golden curl streamed back in the rushing air, her gray eyes glowed with earthly fire, and two red spots on the upper part of her cheeks showed she was much excited without a grain of fear; yet in the first ten minutes one gentleman was unhorsed before her eyes, and one came to grief along with his animal, and a thorough-bred

chestnut was galloping and snorting beside her with empty saddle. Presently young Featherstone, who led her by about fifteen yards, crashed through a high hedge, and was seen no more, but heard wallowing in the deep unsuspected ditch beyond. There was no time to draw bridle. "Lie still, sir, if you please," said Catherine, with cool civility; then up rein, in spur, and she cleared the ditch and its muddy contents, alive and dead, and away without looking behind her.

On, on, on, till all the pinks and buckskins, erst so smart, were splashed with clay and dirt of every hue, and all the horses' late glossy coats were bathed with sweat and lathered with foam, and their gaping nostrils blowing and glowing red; and then it was that Harrowden brook, swollen wide and deep by the late rains, came right between the fox and Dogmore underwood, for which he was making.

The hunt sweeping down a hill-side caught sight of Reynard running for the brook. They made sure of him now. But he lapped a drop, and then slipped in, and soon crawled out on the other side, and made feebly for the covert, weighted with wet fur.

At sight of him the hunt hallooed and trumpeted, and came tearing on with fresh vigor.

But, when they came near the brook, lo! it was twenty feet wide, and running fast and brown. Some riders skirted it, looking for a narrow part. Two horses, being spurred at it, came to the bank, and then went rearing round on their heels, depositing one hat and another rider in the current. One gallant steed planted his feet like a tower, and snorted down at the water. One flopped gravely in and had to swim, and be dragged out. Another leaped, and landed with his feet on the other bank, his haunches in the water, and his rider curled round his neck and glaring out between his retroverted ears.

But Miss Peyton encouraged her horse with spur and voice, set her teeth, turned rather pale this time, and went at the brook with a rush, and cleared it like a deer. She and the huntsman were almost alone together on the other side, and were as close to the hounds as the hounds were to poor pug, when he slipped through a run in a quickset hedge, and glided into Dogmore underwood, a stiff hazel coppice of five years' growth.

The other riders soon straggled up, and then the thing was to get him out again. There were a few narrow roads cut in the underwood, and up and down these the huntsman and whipper-in went trotting, and encouraged the stanch hounds, and whipped the skulkers back into covert. Others galloped uselessly about, pounding the earth, for daisy-cutters were few in those days; and Miss Peyton relapsed into the transcendental. She sat in one place with her elbow on her knee, and her fair chin supported by two fingers, as undisturbed by the fracas of horns and voices as an equestrian statue of Diana.

She sat so still, and so long, at a corner of the underwood, that at last the harassed fox stole out close to her, with lolling tongue and eye askant, and took the open field again. She thrilled at first sight of him, and her cheeks burned; but her quick eye took in all the signs of his distress, and she sat quiet and watched him coolly. Not so her horse; he plunged and then trembled all over, and planted his forefeet together at this angle \, and parted his hind-legs a little, and so stood quivering, with cocked ears, and peeped over a low paling at the retiring quadruped; and fretted and sweated, in anticipation of the gallop his long head told him was to follow. He looked a deal more statuesque than any three statues in England; and all about a creature not up to his knee —and by-the-by; the gentlemen that carve horses in

our native isle, did they ever see one? — Out of an omnibus? The whipper-in came by and found him in this gallant attitude, and suspected the truth; but, observing the rider's tranquil position, thought the fox had only popped out and then in again. However, he fell in with the huntsman, and told him Miss Peyton's gray had seen something. The hounds appeared puzzled; and so the huntsman rode round to Miss Peyton, and, touching his cap, asked her if she had seen anything of the fox.

She looked him dreamily in the face. "The fox," said she: "he broke cover ten minutes ago."

The man blew his horn lustily, and then asked her reproachfully why she had not tally-hoed him, or winded her horn; with that he blew his own again impatiently. Miss Peyton replied very slowly and pensively that the fox had come out soiled and fatigued, and trailing his brush. "I looked at him," said she, "and I pitied him; he was one, and we are many; he was so little, and we are so big: he had given us a good gallop; and so I made up my mind he should live to run another day."

The huntsman stared stupidly at her for a moment, then burst into a torrent of oaths, then blew his horn till it was hoarse, then cursed and swore till he was hoarse himself; then to his horn again, and dogs and men came rushing to the sound.

"Couple up and go home to supper," said Miss Peyton quietly. "The fox is half-way to Gallowstreet Gorse, and you won't get him out of that this afternoon, I promise you."

As she said this, she just touched her horse with the spur, leaped the low hedge in front of her, and cantered slowly home across country; she was one that seldom troubled the hard road, go where she would.

She had ridden about a mile when she heard a horse's

feet behind her; she smiled, and her color rose a little, but she cantered on.

"Halt! in the King's name," shouted a mellow voice, and a gentleman galloped up to her side, and reined in his mare.

"What! have they killed?" inquired Catherine, demurely.

"Not they; he is in the middle of Gallowstreet Gorse by now."

"And is this the way to Gallowstreet Gorse?"

"Nay, mistress," said the young man; "but, when the fox heads one way and the deer another, what is a poor hunter to do?"

"Follow the slower, it seems."

"Say the lovelier and the dearer, sweet Kate."

"Now, Griffith, you know I hate flattery," said Kate; and the next moment came a soft smile, and belied this unsocial sentiment.

"Flattery?" said the lover. "I have no tongue to speak half your praise. I think the people in this country are as blind as bats, or they'd —"

"All except Mr. Griffith Gaunt; *he* has found a paragon where wiser people see a wayward, capricious girl."

"Then *he* is the man for you. Don't you see that, mistress?"

"No, I don't quite see that," said the lady dryly.

This cavalier reply caused a dismay the speaker never intended. The fact is, Mr. George Neville, young, handsome, and rich, had lately settled in the county, and had been greatly smitten with Kate. The county was talking about it, and Griffith had been secretly on thorns for some days past. And now he could hide his uneasiness no longer; he cried out in a sharp trembling voice, "Why, Kate, my dear Kate! what, could you love any man but me? Could you be so cruel? — could you?

There, let me get off my horse, and lie down on this stubble, and you ride over me, and trample me to death. I would rather have you trample on my ribs, than on my heart with loving any one but me."

"Why, what now?" said Catherine, drawing herself up. "I must scold you handsomely;" and she drew rein and turned full upon him; but by this means she saw his face was full of real distress; so, instead of reprimanding him, she said gently, "Why, Griffith, what is to do? Are you not my servant? Do not I send you word whenever I dine from home?"

"Yes, dearest; and then I call at that house, and stick there till they guess what I would be at, and ask me too."

Catherine smiled, and proceeded to remind him that thrice a week she permitted him to ride over from Bolton (a distance of fifteen miles) to see her.

"Yes," replied Griffith, "and I must say you always come, wet or dry, to the shrubbery gate, and put your hand in mine a minute. And, Kate," said he piteously, "at the bare thought of your putting that same dear hand in another man's, my heart turns sick within me, and my skin burns and trembles on me."

"But you have no cause," said Catherine, soothingly. "Nobody, except yourself, doubts my affection for you. You are often thrown in my teeth, Griffith — and (clenching her own) I like you all the better — of course."

Griffith replied with a burst of gratitude: and then, as men will, proceeded to encroach. "Ah," said he, "if you would but pluck up courage, and take the matrimonial fence with me at once."

Miss Peyton sighed at that and drooped a little upon her saddle. After a pause, she enumerated the "just impediments." She reminded him that neither of them had means to marry on.

He made light of that, he should soon have plenty;

Mr. Charlton had as good as told him he was to have Bolton Hall and Grange: "Six hundred acres, Kate, beside the park and paddocks."

In his warmth he forgot that Catherine was to have been Mr. Charlton's heir. Catherine was too high-minded to bear Griffith any grudge; but she colored a little, and said she was averse to come to him a penniless bride.

"Why, what matters it which of us has the dross, so that there is enough for both?" said Griffith, with an air of astonishment.

Catherine smiled approbation, and tacitly yielded that point. But then she objected the difference in their faith.

"Oh, honest folk get to heaven by different roads," said Griffith, carelessly.

"I have been taught otherwise," replied Catherine, gravely.

"Then give me your hand, and I'll give you my soul," said Griffith Gaunt, impetuously. "I'll go to heaven your way, if you can't go mine. Anything sooner than be parted in this world, or the next."

She looked at him in silence; and it was in a faint, half-apologetic tone she objected that all her kinsfolk were set against it.

"It is not their business; it is ours," was the prompt reply."

"Well, then," said Catherine sadly, "I suppose I must tell you the true reason; I feel I should not make you happy; I do not love you quite as you want to be loved, as you deserve to be loved. You need not look so; nothing in flesh and blood is your rival. But my heart it bleeds for the Church. I think of her ancient glory in this kingdom, and, when I see her present condition, I long to devote myself to her service. I am very fit to

be an abbess or a nun; most unfit to be a wife. No, no; I must not, ought not, dare not, marry a Protestant. Take the advice of one who esteems you dearly; leave me — fly from me — forget me — do everything but hate me. Nay, do not hate me: you little know the struggle in my mind. Farewell: the saints, whom you scorn, watch over and protect you: farewell."

And with this she sighed, and struck her spur into the gray, and he darted off at a gallop.

Griffith, little able to cope with such a character as this, sat petrified, and would have been rooted to the spot if he had happened to be on foot. But his mare set off after her companion, and a chase of a novel kind commenced. Catherine's horse was fresher than Griffith's mare, and the latter, not being urged by her petrified master, lost ground.

But, when she drew near to her father's gate, Catherine relaxed her speed, and Griffith rejoined her.

She had already half relented, and only wanted a warm and resolute wooer to bring her round. But Griffith was too sore, and too little versed in woman. Full of suspicion and bitterness he paced gloomy and silent by her side, till they reached the great avenue that led to her father's house.

And while he rides alongside the capricious creature in sulky silence, I may as well reveal a certain foible in his own character.

This Griffith Gaunt was by no means deficient in physical courage; but he was instinctively disposed to run away from mental pain the moment he lost hope of driving it away from him. For instance, if Catherine had been ill and her life in danger, he would have ridden day and night to save her; but if she had died he would either have killed himself, or else fled the country, and so escaped the sight of every object that was associated

with her, and could agonize him. I do not think he could have attended the funeral of one he loved.

The mind, as well as the body, has its self-protecting instincts. This of Griffith's was after all an instinct of that class, and, under certain circumstances, is true wisdom. But Griffith, I think, carried the instinct to excess; and that is why I call it his foible.

"Catherine," he said resolutely, "let me ride by your side to the house for once, for I read your advice my own way, and I mean to follow it: after to-day you will be troubled with me no more. I have loved you these three years, I have courted you these two years, and I am none the nearer. I see I am not the man you mean to marry; so I shall do as my father did, ride down to the coast, and sell my horse, and ship for foreign parts."

"Oh! as you will," said Catherine haughtily. She quite forgot she had just recommended him to do something of this very kind.

Presently she stole a look. His fine ruddy cheek was pale; his manly brown eyes were moist; yet a gloomy and resolute expression on his tight-drawn lips. She looked at him sidelong, and thought how often he had ridden thirty miles on that very mare to get a word with her at the shrubbery gate. And now the mare to be sold! The man to go broken-hearted to sea; perhaps to his death! Her good heart began to yearn. "Griffith," said she softly, "it is not as if I was going to wed anybody else. Is it nothing to be preferred by her you say you love? If I was you I would do nothing rash. Why not give me a little time? In truth, I hardly know my own mind about it two days together."

"Kate," said the young man firmly, "I am courting you this two years. If I wait two years more it will be but to see the right man come and carry you in a month; for so girls are won when they are won at all. Your

sister that is married and dead, she held Josh Pitt in hand for years; and what is the upshot? Why, he wears the willow for her to this day; and her husband, he married again before her grave was green. Nay, I have done all an honest man can do to woo you; so take me now or let me go."

At this Kate began to waver secretly, and ask herself whether it would not be better to yield, since he was so resolute.

But the unlucky fellow did not leave well alone. He went on to say, "Once out of sight of this place, I may cure myself of my fancy. Here I never could."

"Oh!" said Catherine directly, "if you are so bent on being cured, it would not become me to say nay."

Griffith Gaunt bit his lip and hung his head, and made no reply.

The patience with which he received her hard speech was more apparent than real; but it told. Catherine, receiving no fresh positive provocation, relented again of her own accord, and, after a considerable silence, whispered softly, "Think how we should all miss you."

Here was an overture to reconciliation. But unfortunately it brought out what had long been rankling in Griffith's mind, and was in fact the real cause of the misunderstanding. "Oh!" said he, "those I care for will soon find another to take my place. Soon; quotha. They have not waited till I was gone for that."

"Ah, indeed!" said Catherine with some surprise; then, like the quick-witted girl she was, "so this is what all the coil is about." She then, with a charming smile, begged him to inform her who was his destined successor in her esteem. Griffith colored purple at her cool hypocrisy (for such he considered it), and replied, almost fiercely, "Who but that young black-a-vised George Neville, that you have been coquetting with this month

past, and danced all night with him at Lady Munster's ball, you did?"

Catherine blushed, and said deprecatingly, "*You* were not there, Griffith; or to be sure I had not danced with *him*."

"And he toasts you by name wherever he goes."

"Can I help that? Wait till I toast him before you make yourself ridiculous, and me very angry — about nothing."

Griffith, sticking to his one idea, replied doggedly, "Mistress Alice Peyton shilly-shallied with her true lover for years, till Richard Hilton came that was not fit to tie his shoes, and then —." Catherine cut him short: "Affront me, if nothing less will serve, but spare my sister in her grave." She began this sentence angrily, but concluded it in a broken voice. Griffith was half disarmed, but only half. He answered sullenly, "She did not die till she had jilted an honest gentleman, and broken his heart, and married a sot, to her cost. And you are of her breed, when all is done; and now that young coxcomb has come, like Dick Hilton, between you and me."

"But I do not encourage him."

"You do not *dis*courage him," retorted Griffith, "or he would not be so hot after you. Were you ever the woman to say, 'I have a servant already that loves me dear?' — That one frank word had sent him packing."

Miss Peyton colored, and the water came into her eyes. "I may have been imprudent," she murmured. "The young gentleman made me smile with his extravagance. I never thought to be misunderstood by him, far less by you." Then, suddenly, bold as brass, "'Tis all your fault; if he had the power to make you uneasy, why did you not check me before?"

"Ay, forsooth! and have it cast in my teeth I was a

jealous monster, and played the tyrant before my time. A poor fellow scarce knows what to be at, that loves a coquette."

"Coquette I am none," replied the lady, bridling magnificently.

Griffith took no notice of this interruption. He proceeded to say that he had hitherto endured this intrusion of a rival in silence, though with a sore heart, hoping his patience might touch her, or the fire go out of itself. But at last, unable to bear it any longer in silence, he had shown his wound to one he knew could feel for him, his poor friend Pitt. Pitt had then let him know that his own mistake had been over-confidence in Alice Peyton's constancy. "He said to me, 'Watch your Kate close, and, at the first blush of a rival, say you to her, Part with him, or part with me.'"

Catherine pinned him directly. "And this is how you take Joshua Pitt's advice: by offering to run away from this sorry rival."

The shrewd reply, and a curl of the lip, half-arch, half-contemptuous, that accompanied the thrust, staggered the less ready Griffith. He got puzzled, and showed it.

"Well, but," stammered he at last, "your spirit is high; I was mostly afeard to put it so plump to you, so I thought I would go about a bit. However, it comes to the same thing; for this I do know, that, if you refuse me your hand this day, it is to give it to a new acquaintance, as your Alice did before you. And, if it is to be so, 'tis best for me to be gone; best for *him* and best for you. You don't know me, Kate, for as clever as you are. At the thought of your playing me false, after all these years, and marrying that George Neville, my heart turns to ice, and then to fire, my head seems ready to burst, and my hands to do mad and bloody acts. Ay, I feel I should kill him, or you, or both, at the church porch.

Ah!" He suddenly griped her arm, and, at the same time, involuntarily checked his mare.

Both horses stopped.

She raised her head with an inquiring look, and saw her lover's face discolored with passion, and so strangely convulsed, that she feared at first he was in a fit, or stricken with death or palsy.

She uttered a cry of alarm, and stretched forth her hand towards him.

But the next moment she drew it back from him; for, following his eye, she discerned the cause of this ghastly look. Her father's house stood at the end of the avenue they had just entered; but there was another approach to it; viz., by a bridle-road at right angles to the avenue, or main entrance; and up that bridle-road a gentleman was walking his horse, and bade fair to meet them at the hall-door.

It was young Neville. There was no mistaking his piebald charger for any other animal in that county.

Kate Peyton glanced from lover to lover, and shuddered at Griffith. She was familiar with petty jealousy; she had even detected it pinching or coloring many a pretty face that tried very hard to hide it all the time. But that was nothing to what she saw now. Hitherto she had but beheld the feeling of jealousy, but now she witnessed the livid passion of jealousy writhing in every lineament of a human face. That terrible passion had transfigured its victim in a moment: the ruddy, genial, kindly Griffith, with his soft brown eye, was gone; and in his place lowered a face older and discolored and convulsed, and almost demoniacal.

Women (wiser, perhaps, in this than men) take their strongest impressions by the eye, not ear. Catherine, I say, looked at him she had hitherto thought she knew; looked and feared him. And, even while she looked,

and shuddered, Griffith spurred his mare sharply, and then drew her head across the gray gelding's path. It was an instinctive impulse to bar the lady he loved from taking another step towards the place where his rival awaited her. "I cannot bear it," he gasped. "Choose you now once for all between that puppy there and me," and he pointed with his riding-whip at his rival, and waited with his teeth clenched for her decision.

The movement was rapid, the gesture large and commanding, and the words manly; for what says the fighting poet? —

> "He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who fears to put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all."

CHAPTER II.

Miss Peyton drew herself up and back by one motion, like a queen at bay; but still she eyed him with a certain respect, and was careful now not to provoke nor pain him needlessly.

"I prefer *you* — though you speak harshly to me, sir," said she with gentle dignity.

"Then give me your hand with that man in sight, and end my torments: promise to marry me this very week. Ah, Kate, have pity on your poor faithful servant who has loved you so long!"

"I do, Griffith, I do," said she sweetly, "but I shall never marry now. Only set your mind at rest about Mr. Neville there. He has never asked me, for one thing."

"He soon will, then."

"No, no; I declare I will be very cool to him, after what you have said to me. But I cannot marry you neither. I dare not. Listen to me, and do, pray, govern your temper, as I am doing mine. I have often read of men with a passion for jealousy, — I mean men whose jealousy feeds upon air, and defies reason. I know you now for such a man. Marriage would not cure this madness, for wives do not escape admiration any more than maids. Something tells me you would be jealous of every fool that paid me some stale compliment, jealous of my female friends, and jealous of my relations, and, perhaps, jealous of your own children, and of that holy persecuted Church, which must still have a large share of *my* heart. No, no; your face and your words

have shown me a precipice. I tremble, and draw back, and now I never *will* marry at all. From this day I give myself to the Church."

Griffith did not believe one word of all this. "That is your answer to me," said he bitterly. "When the right man puts the question (and he is not far off), you will tell another tale. You take me for a fool, and you mock me. You are not the lass to die an old maid, and men are not the fools to let you. With faces like yours, the new servant comes before the first one is gone. Well, I have got my answer. County Cumberland, you are no place for me. The ways and the fields we two have rid together, oh, how could I bear their sight without my dear? Why, what a poor-spirited fool am I to stay and whine! Come, mistress, your lover waits you there, and your discarded servant knows good breeding: he leaves the country not to spoil your sport."

Catherine panted heavily. "Well, sir," said she, "then, it is your doing, not mine. Will you not even shake hands with me, Griffith?"

"I were a brute else," sighed the jealous one, with a sudden revulsion of feeling. "I have spent the happiest hours of my life beside you. If I loved thee less I had never left thee."

He clung a little while to her hand, more like a drowning man than anything else; then let it go, and suddenly shook his clenched fist in the direction of George Neville, and cried out with a savage yell, "My curse on him that parts us twain! And you, Kate, may God bless you single, and curse you married; and that is my last word in Cumberland."

"Amen," said Catherine resignedly.

And even with this they wheeled their horses apart, and rode away from each other: she very pale, but erect

with wounded pride; he reeling in his saddle like a drunken man.

And so Griffith Gaunt, stung mad by jealousy, affronted his sweetheart, the proudest girl in Cumberland, and, yielding to his foible, fled from his pain.

Our foibles are our manias.

CHAPTER III.

Miss Peyton was shocked and grieved at bottom, but she was also affronted and wounded. Now, anger seems to have some fine buoyant quality, which makes it rise and come uppermost in an agitated mind. She rode proudly into the courtyard of her father's house, and would not look once behind to see the last of her perverse lover.

The old groom, Joe, who had taught her to ride when she was six years old, saw her coming, and hobbled out to hold her horse, while she alighted. "Mistress Kate," said he, "have you seen Master Griffith Gaunt anywheres?"

The young lady colored at this question. "Why?" said she.

"Why?" repeated old Joe, a little contemptuously. "Why, where have *you* been not to know the country is out after un? First comed Jock Dennet, with his horse all in a lather, to say old Mr. Charlton was took ill, and had asked for Master Griffith. I told him to go to Dogmore Copse: 'our Kate is a hunting to-day,' says I, 'and your Griffith he is sure not to be far from her gelding's tail;' a sticks in his spurs and away a goes: what, hain't you seen Jock neither?"

"No, no," replied Miss Peyton, impatiently; "what, is there anything the matter?"

"The matter, quo she! Why, Jock hadn't been gone an hour when in rides the new footman all in a lather, and brings a letter for Master Griffith from the old gentleman's housekeeper: 'you leave the letter with me,

in case,' says I, and I sends him afield after t'other. Here be the letter."

He took off his cap and produced the letter.

Catherine started at the sight of it. "Alas!" said she, "this is a heavy day. Look, Joe; sealed with black; poor cousin Charlton! I doubt he is no more."

Joe shook his head expressively, and told her the butcher had come from that part not ten minutes ago, with word that the blinds were all down at Bolton Hall.

Poor human nature! a gleam of joy shot through Catherine's heart; this sad news would compel Griffith to stay at home and bury his benefactor; and that delay would give him time to reflect; and somehow or other she felt sure it would end in his not going at all.

But these thoughts had no sooner passed through her than she was ashamed of them and of herself. What, welcome that poor old man's death because it would keep her cross-grained lover at home? Her cheeks burned with shame, and with a superfluous exercise of self-defence she retired from old Joe, lest he should divine what was passing in her mind.

But she was so rapt in thought that she carried the letter away with her unconsciously.

As she passed through the hall she heard George Neville and her father in animated conversation. She mounted the stairs softly, and went into a little boudoir of her own on the first floor, and sat down. The house stood high, and there was a very expansive and beautiful view of the country from this window. She sat down by it and drooped, and looked wistfully through the window, and thought of the past, and fell into a sad reverie. Pity began to soften her pride and anger, and presently two gentle tears dimmed her glorious eyes a moment, and then stole down her delicate cheeks.

While she sat thus lost in the past, jovial voices and

creaking boots broke suddenly upon her ear, and came up the stairs; they jarred upon her; so she cast one last glance out of the window, and rose to get out of their way if possible: but it was too late; a heavy step came to the door, and a ruddy port-drinking face peeped in. It was her father. "See-ho!" roared the jovial Squire. "I've found the hare on her form: bide thou outside a moment." And he entered the room; but he had no sooner closed the door than his whole manner changed from loud and jovial to agitated and subdued. "Kate, my girl," said he piteously, "I have been a bad father to thee. I have spent all the money that should have been thine; thy poor father can scarce look thee in the face. So now I bring thee a good husband; be a good child now, and a dutiful. Neville's Court is his, and Neville's Cross will be, by the entail; and so will the baronetcy. I shall see my girl Lady Neville."

"Never, papa, never," cried Kate.

"Hush! hush!" said the squire, and put up his hand to her in great agitation and alarm: "hush! or he will hear ye. Kate," he whispered, "are you mad? Little I thought, when he asked to see me, it was to offer marriage. Be a good girl now; don't you quarrel with good luck. You are not fit to be poor, and you have made enemies. Do but think how they will flout you when I die, and Bill's jade of a wife puts you to the door as she will; and now you can triumph over them all; my Lady Neville; and make your poor father happy; my Lady Neville. Enough said, for I have promised you; so don't go and make a fool of me and yourself into the bargain. And — and — a word in your ear; he has lent me a hundred pounds."

At this climax the father hung his head; the daughter winced and moaned out, "Papa! how *could* you?"

Mr. Peyton had gradually descended to that inter-

mediate stage of degradation, when the substance of dignity is all gone, but its shadow, shame, remains. He stamped impatiently on the ground, and cut his humiliation short by rushing out of the room. "Here, try your own luck, youngster," he cried at the door. "She knows my mind." He trampled down the stairs, and young George Neville knocked respectfully at the door, though it was half open; and came in with youth's light foot, and a handsome face flushed into beauty by love and hope.

Miss Peyton's eye just swept him, as he entered, and with the same movement she turned away her fair head and blushing cheek towards the window; yet, must I own it, she quietly moulded the letter that lay in her lap, so that the address was no longer visible to the newcomer.

Small secrecy, verging on deceit, you are bred in women's bones.

This blushing and averted cheek is one of those equivocal receptions that have puzzled many a sensible man. It is a sign of coy love; it is a sign of gentle aversion; *our* mode of interpreting it is simple and judicious; whichever it happens to be, we go and take it for the other.

The brisk, bold wooer that now engaged Kate Peyton was not the man to be dashed by a woman's coyness. Handsome, daring, good-humored, and vain, he had everything in his favor but his novelty.

Look at Kate! her eye lingers wistfully on that disconsolate horseman whose every step takes him farther from her; but George has her ear, and draws closer and closer to it, and pours love's mellow murmurs into it.

He told her he had made the grand tour, and seen the beauties of every land, but none like her; other ladies had certainly pleased his eye for a moment, but she alone

had conquered his heart. He said many charming things to her such as Griffith Gaunt had never said. Amongst the rest, he assured her the beauty of her person would not alone have fascinated him so deeply; but he had seen the beauty of her mind in those eyes of hers that seemed not eyes, but souls: and, begging her pardon for his presumption, he aspired to wed her mind.

Such ideas had often risen in Kate's own mind; but to hear them from a man was new. She looked askant through the window at the lessening Griffith, and thought, "How the grand tour improves a man!" and said as coldly as she could, "I esteem you, sir, and cannot but be flattered by sentiments so superior to those I am used to hear; but let this go no further. I shall never marry now."

Instead of being angry at this, or telling her she wanted to marry somebody else, as the injudicious Griffith had done, young Neville had the address to treat it as an excellent jest, and drew such comical pictures of all the old maids in the neighborhood, that she could not help smiling.

But the moment she smiled, the inflammable George made hot love to her again. Then she besought him to leave her, piteously. Then he said cheerfully he would leave her as soon as ever she had promised to be his. At that she turned sullen and haughty, and looked through the window and took no notice of him whatever. Then, instead of being discouraged or mortified, he showed imperturbable confidence and good humor, and begged archly to know what interesting object was in sight from that window. On this she blushed and withdrew her eyes from the window, and so they met his. On that he threw himself on his knees (custom of the day), and wooed her with such a burst of passionate and tearful eloquence that she began to pity him, and said

she, lifting her lovely eyes, "Alas! I was born to make all those I esteem, unhappy;" and she sighed deeply.

"Not a bit of it," said he; "you were born, like the sun, to bless all you shine upon. Sweet Mistress Kate, I love you as these country boors can never be taught to love. I lay my heart, my name, my substance, at your feet; you shall not be loved, you shall be worshipped. Ah! turn those eyes, brimful of soul, on me again, and let me try and read in them that one day, no matter how distant, the delight of my eyes, the joy of all my senses, the pride of Cumberland, the pearl of England, the flower of womankind, the rival of the angels, the darling of George Neville's heart, will be George Neville's wife."

Fire and water were in his eyes, passion in every tone; his manly hand grasped hers and trembled, and drew her gently towards him.

Her bosom heaved; his passionate male voice and manner electrified her, and made her flutter. "Spare me this pain," she faltered; and she looked through the window and thought, "Poor Griffith was right after all, and I was wrong. He had cause for jealousy, and CAUSE FOR FEAR."

And then she pitied him who panted at her side, and then was sorry for him who rode away disconsolate, still lessening to her eye; and what with this conflict, and the emotion her quarrel with Griffith had already caused her, she leaned her head back against the shutter, and began to sob low, but almost hysterically.

Now, Mr. George Neville was neither a fool nor a novice. If he had never been downright in love before (which I crave permission to doubt), he had gone far enough on that road to make one Italian lady, two French, one Austrian, and one Creole in love with him; and each of these love affairs had given him fresh insight into the ways of women. Enlightened by so many bit-

ter-sweet experiences, he saw at once that there was something more going on inside Kate's heaving bosom than he could have caused by offering her his hand. He rose from his knees, and leaned against the opposite shutter, and fixed his eyes a little sadly, but very observantly, on her, as she leaned back against the shutter, sobbing low but hysterically, and quivering all over.

"There's some other man at the bottom of this," thought George Neville.

"Mistress Kate," said he, gently, "I do not come here to make you weep. I love you like a gentleman. If you love another, take courage, tell me so, and don't let your father constrain your inclinations. Dearly as I love you, I would not wed your person and your heart another's; that would be too cruel to you, and (drawing himself up with sudden majesty) too unjust to myself."

Kate looked up at him through her tears, and admired this man, who could love ardently, yet be proud and just. And if this appeal to her candor had been made yesterday, she would have said, frankly, "There is one I — esteem." But, since the quarrel, she would not own to herself, far less to another, that she loved a man who had turned his back upon her. So she *parried.*

"There is no one I love enough to wed," said she. "I am a cold-hearted girl, born to give pain to my betters. But I shall do something desperate to end all this."

"All what?" said he, keenly.

"The whole thing; my unprofitable life."

"Mistress Kate," said Neville, "I asked you was there another man. If you had answered me, 'In truth there is, but he is poor and my father is averse,' or the like; then I would have stood his friend, for your sake. But you say there is no man you love. Then I say you shall be Dame Neville."

"What, whether I will or no?"

"Yes, whether you *think* you will or no."

Catherine turned her dreamy eyes on him.

"You have had a good master. Why did you not come to me sooner?"

She was thinking more of him than of herself, and in fact paying too little heed to her words. But she had no sooner uttered this inadvertent speech than she felt she had said too much; she blushed a rosy red, and hid her face in her hands in the most charming confusion.

"Sweetest, it is not an hour too late, as you do not love another," was stout George Neville's reply.

But nevertheless the cunning rogue thought it safest to temporize, and put his coy mistress off her guard. So he ceased to alarm her by pressing the question of marriage, but seduced her into a charming talk, where the topics were not so personal, and only the tones of his voice and the glances of his expressive eyes were caressing. He was on his mettle to please her by hook or by crook, and was delightful, irresistible. He set her at ease, and she began to listen more, and even to smile faintly, and to look through the window a little less perseveringly.

Suddenly the spell was broken for awhile.

And by whom?

By the other.

Ay, you may well stare. It sounds strange, but it is true, that the poor forlorn horseman, hanging like a broken man, as he was, over his tired horse, and wending his solitary way from her he loved, and resigning the field, like a goose, to the very rival he feared, did yet (like the retiring Parthian) shoot an arrow right into that pretty boudoir, and hit both his sweetheart and his rival; hit them hard enough to spoil their sport, and

make a little mischief between them, for that afternoon, at all events.

The arrow came into the room after this fashion.

Kate was sitting in a very feminine attitude. When a man wants to look in any direction, he turns his body and his eye the same way and does it; but women love to cast oblique regards, and this their instinct is a fruitful source of their graceful and characteristic postures.

Kate Peyton was at this moment a statue of her sex. Her fair head leaned gently back against the corner of the window-shutter, her pretty feet and fair person in general were opposite George Neville, who sat facing the window but in the middle of the room; her arms, half pendent, half extended, went listlessly aslant her and somewhat to the right of her knees, yet by an exquisite turn of the neck her gray eyes contrived to be looking dreamily out of the window to her left. Still, in this figure that pointed one way and looked another, there was no distortion; all was easy, and full of that subtle grace we artists call repose.

But suddenly she dissolved this feminine attitude, rose to her feet, and interrupted her wooer civilly. "Excuse me," said she, "but can you tell me which way that road on the hill leads to?"

Her companion stared a little at so sudden a turn in the conversation, but replied by asking her with perfect good humor what road she meant.

"The one that gentleman on horseback has just taken. Surely," she continued, "that road does not take to Bolton Hall."

"Certainly not," said George, following the direction of her finger, "Bolton lies to the right. That road takes to the seacoast by Otterbury and Stanhope."

"I thought so," said Kate. "How unfortunate! He cannot know. But indeed, how should he?"

"Who cannot know? and what? you speak in riddles, mistress; and how pale you are; are you ill?"

"No, not ill, sir," faltered Kate; "but you see me much discomposed. My cousin Charlton died this day; and the news met me at the very door." She could say no more.

Mr. Neville, on hearing this news, began to make many excuses for having inadvertently intruded himself upon her on such a day; but in the midst of his apologies she suddenly looked him full in the face, and said with nervous abruptness, "You *talk* like a preux chevalier; I wonder whether you would ride five or six miles to do me a service?"

"Ay, a thousand," said the young man, glowing with pleasure. "What is to do?"

Kate pointed through the window. "You see that gentleman on horseback. Well, I happen to know he is leaving the country; he thinks that he — that I — that Mr. Charlton has many years to live. He must be told Mr. Charlton is dead, and his presence is required at Bolton Hall. I *should* like somebody to gallop after him and give him this letter; but my own horse is tired, and I am tired — and, to be frank, there is a little coolness between the gentleman himself and me. Oh, I wish him no ill, but really I am not upon terms — I do not feel complaisant enough to carry a letter after him; yet I do feel that he *must* have it; do not *you* think it would be malicious and unworthy in me to keep the news from him, when I know it is so?"

Young Neville smiled. "Nay, mistress, why so many words? Give me your letter, and I will soon overtake the gentleman; he seems in no great hurry."

Kate thanked him, and made a polite apology for giving him so much trouble, and handed him the letter: when it came to that, she held it out to him rather

irresolutely; but he took it promptly and bowed low after the fashion of the day; she courtesied; he marched off with alacrity; she sat down again and put her head in her hand to think it all over, and a chill thought ran through her, was her conduct wise? What would Griffith think at her employing his rival? Would he not infer Neville had entered her service in more senses than one? Perhaps he would throw the letter down in a rage and never read it.

Steps came rapidly, the door opened, and there was George Neville again; but not the same George Neville that went out but thirty seconds before. He stood at the door looking very black, and with a sardonic smile on his lips. "An excellent jest, mistress," said he, ironically.

"Why, what is the matter?" said the lady, stoutly; but her red cheeks belied her assumption of innocence.

"Oh, not much," said George, with a bitter sneer. "It is an old story; only I thought you were nobler than the rest of your sex. This letter is to Mr. Griffith Gaunt."

"Well, sir," said Kate, with a face of serene and candid innocence.

"And Mr. Griffith Gaunt is a suitor of yours."

"Say, *was*. He is so no longer. He and I are out. But for that, think you I had even listened to — what you have been saying to me this ever so long?"

"Oh, that alters the case," said George. "But stay!" and he knitted his brows and reflected. Up to a moment ago the loftiness of Catherine Peyton's demeanor, and the celestial something in her soul-like dreamy eyes, had convinced him she was a creature free from the small dishonesty and duplicity he had noted in so many women otherwise amiable and good.

But this business of the letter had shaken the illusion.

"Stay," said he stiffly. "You say Mr. Gaunt and you are out."

Catherine assented by a movement of her fair head.

"And he is leaving the country. Perhaps this letter is to keep him from leaving the country?"

"Only until he has buried his benefactor," murmured Kate, in deprecating accents.

George wore a bitter sneer at this. "Mistress Kate," said he, after a significant pause, "do you read Molière?"

She bridled a little, and would not reply; she knew Molière quite well enough not to want his wit levelled at her head.

"Do you admire the character of Celimene?"

No reply.

"You do not. How can you? She was too much your inferior. She never sent one of her lovers with a letter to the other to stop his flight. Well, you may eclipse Celimene; but permit me to remind you that I am George Neville, and not Georges Dandin."

Miss Peyton rose from her seat with eyes that literally flashed fire, and, the horrible truth must be told, her first wild impulse was to reply to all this Molière with one cut of her little riding-whip; but she had a swift mind, and two reflections entered it together: first, that this would be unlike a gentlewoman; secondly, that if she whipped Mr. Neville, however slightly, he would not lend her his piebald horse, so she took stronger measures; she just sank down again and faltered, "I do not understand these bitter words; I have no lover at all, I never will have one again. But it is hard to think I cannot make a friend, nor keep a friend." And so lifted up her hands and began to cry piteously.

Then the stout George was taken aback, and made to think himself a ruffian.

"Nay, do not weep so, Mistress Kate," said he hurriedly.

"Come, take courage. I am not jealous of Mr. Gaunt; a man that hath been two years dangling after you, and could not win you. I look but to my own self-respect in the matter. I know your sex better than you know yourselves: were I to carry that letter you would thank me now, but by and by despise me; now as I mean you to be my wife, I will not risk your contempt. Why not take my horse, put who you like on him, and so convey the letter to Mr. Gaunt?"

Now this was all the fair mourner wanted; so she said, "No, no, she would not be beholden to him for anything; he had spoken harshly to her, and misjudged her cruelly, cruelly: oh! oh! oh!"

Then he implored her to grant him this small favor; then she cleared up and said, "Well, sooner than bear malice, she would." He thanked her for granting him that favor. She went off with the letter, saying, "I will be back anon." But, once she got clear, she opened the door again, and peeped in at him gayly, and said she, "Why not ask me who *wrote* the letter before you compared me to that French coquette?" And with this made him an arch courtesy, and tripped away.

Mr. George Neville opened his eyes with astonishment. This arch question, and Kate's manner of putting it, convinced him the obnoxious missive was not a love-letter at all. He was sorry now, and vexed with himself for having called her a coquette, and make her cry. After all, what was the mighty favor she had asked of him? To carry a sealed letter from somebody or other to a person who, to be sure, had been her lover, but was so no longer. A simple act of charity and civility, and he had refused it in injurious terms.

He was glad he had lent his horse, and almost sorry he had not taken the letter himself.

To these chivalrous self-reproaches succeeded an uneasy

feeling that perhaps the lady might retaliate somehow. It struck him, on reflection, that the arch query she had let fly at him was accompanied with a certain sparkle of the laughing eye, such as ere now had, in his experience, preceded a stroke of the feminine claw.

As he walked up and down, uneasy, awaiting the fair one's return, her father came up, and asked him to dine and sleep. What made the invitation more welcome was that it in reality came from Kate. "She tells me she has borrowed your horse," said the squire, "so says she, I am bound to take care of you till daylight, and indeed our ways are perilous at night."

"She is an angel!" cried the lover, all his ardor revived by this unexpected trait; "my horse, my house, my hand, and my heart, are all at her service by night and day."

Mr. Peyton, to while away the time before dinner, invited him to walk out and see — a hog: deadly fat, as times went. But Neville denied himself that satisfaction on the plea that he had his orders to await Miss Peyton's return where he was. The squire was amused at his excessive docility, and winked, as much as to say, "I have been once upon a time in your plight," and so went and gloried in his hog alone.

The lover fell into a delicious reverie. He enjoyed by anticipation the novel pleasure of an evening passed all alone with this charming girl. The father, being friendly to his suit, would go to sleep after dinner; and then, by the subdued light of a wood-fire he would murmur his love into that sweet ear for hours, until the averted head should come around by degrees, and the delicious lips yield a coy assent. He resolved the night should not close till he had surprised, overpowered, and secured his lovely bride.

These soft meditations reconciled him for awhile to the prolonged absence of their object.

In the midst of them he happened to glance through the window, and he saw a sight that took his very breath away, and rooted him in amazement to the spot. About a mile from the house a lady in a scarlet habit was galloping across country as the crow flies. Hedge, ditch, or brook, nothing stopped her an instant; and as for the pace, —

She seemed in running to devour the way.

It was Kate Peyton on his piebald horse.

CHAPTER IV.

GRIFFITH GAUNT, unknown to himself, had lost temper as well as heart before he took the desperate step of leaving the country. Now, his temper was naturally good, and, ere he had ridden two miles, he recovered it. To his cost; for the sustaining force of anger being gone, he was alone with his grief. He drew the rein half mechanically, and from a spirited canter declined to a walk.

And the slower he went the chillier grew his heart, till it lay half ice, half lead, in his bosom.

Parted! oh, word pregnant with misery!

Never to see those heavenly eyes again, nor hear that silvery voice! Never again to watch that peerless form walk the minuet; nor see it lift the gray horse over a fence with the grace and spirit that seemed inseparable from it!

Desolation streamed over him at the thought. And next his forlorn mind began to cling even to the inanimate objects that were dotted about the place which held her. He passed a little farm-house into which Kate and he had once been driven by a storm, and had sat together by the kitchen fire; and the farmer's wife had smiled on them for sweethearts, and had made them drink rum and milk, and stay till the sun was fairly out. "Ah! good-by, little farm," he sighed, "when shall I ever see you again?"

He passed a brook where they had often stopped together and given their panting horses just a mouthful after a run with the harriers. "Good-by, little brook!"

said he; "you will ripple on as before, and warble as you go, but I shall never drink at your water more, nor hear your pleasant murmur with her I love."

He sighed and crept away, still making for the sea.

In the icy depression of his heart, his body and his senses were half paralyzed, and none would have known the accomplished huntsman in this broken man, who hung anyhow over his mare's neck, and went to and fro in the saddle.

When he had gone about five miles, he came to the crest of a hill: he remembered that, once past that brow, he could see Peyton Hall no more. He turned slowly and cast a sorrowful look at it.

It was winter, but the afternoon sun had come out bright. The horizontal beams struck full upon the house, and all the western panes shone like burnished gold; her very abode, how glorious it looked! And he was to see it no more.

He gazed and gazed at the bright house till love and sorrow dimmed his eyes, and he could see the beloved place no more. Then his dogged will prevailed, and carried him away towards the sea, but crying like a woman now, and hanging all dislocated over his horse's mane.

Now about a mile farther on, as he crept along on a vile and narrow road, all woe-begone and broken, he heard a mighty scurry of horse's feet in the field to his left; he looked languidly up; and the first thing he saw was a great piebald horse's head and neck in the act of rising in the air, and doubling his fore-legs under him to leap the low hedge a yard or two in front of him.

He did leap, and landed just in front of Griffith; his rider curbed him so keenly that he went back almost on his haunches, and then stood motionless all across the road, with quivering tail. A lady in a scarlet riding-

habit and purple cap, sat him as if he had been a throne instead of a horse, and, without moving her body, turned her head swift as a snake, and fixed her great gray eyes full and searching on Griffith Gaunt.

He uttered a little shout of joy and amazement, his mare reared and plunged, and then was quiet. And thus Kate Peyton and he met, at right angles, and so close that it looked as if she had meant to ride him down.

How he stared at her! how more than mortal fair she shone, returning to those bereaved eyes of his, as if she had really dropped from heaven.

His clasped hands, his haggard face channelled by tears, showed the keen girl she was strong where she had thought herself weak, and she comported herself accordingly, and in one moment took a much higher tone than she had intended as she came along.

"I am afraid," said she, very coldly, "you will have to postpone your journey a day or two. I am grieved to tell you that poor Mr. Charlton is dead."

Griffith uttered an exclamation.

"He asked for you; and messengers are out after you on every side. You must go to Bolton at once."

"Well-a-day!" said Griffith, "has he left me too? Good kind old man, on any other day I had found tears for thee. But now methinks happy are the dead. Alas! sweet mistress, I hoped you came to tell me you had — I might — what signifies what I hoped — when I saw you had deigned to ride after me. Why should I go to Bolton after all?"

"Because you will be an ungrateful wretch else. What, leave others to carry your kinsman and your benefactor to his grave, while you turn your back on him, and inherit his estate? For shame, sir! for shame!"

Griffith expostulated humbly. "How hardly you judge me! What are Bolton Hall and Park to me now? They

were to have been yours, you know. And yours they shall be. I came between and robbed you. To be sure, the old man knew my mind. He said to himself, 'Griffith or Kate, what matters it who has the land? they will live together on it.' But all that is changed now: you will never share it with me; and so I do feel that I have no right to the place. Kate, my own Kate, I have heard them sneer at you for being poor, and it made my heart ache. I'll stop that any way. Go you in my place to the funeral: he that is dead will forgive me: his spirit knows now what I endure: and I'll send you a writing, all sealed and signed, shall make Bolton Hall and Park yours; and, when you are happy with some one you *can* love, as well as I love you, think sometimes of poor jealous Griffith, that loved you dear and grudged you nothing; but," grinding his teeth and turning white, "I *can't* live in Cumberland, and see you in another man's arms."

Then Catherine trembled, and could not speak awhile; but at last she faltered out, "You will make me *hate* you."

"God forbid!" said simple Griffith.

"Well then, don't thwart me, and provoke me so, but just turn your horse's head and go quietly home to Bolton Hall, and do your duty to the dead and the living. You can't go *this* way for me and my horse;" then, seeing him waver, this virago faltered out, "and I have been so tried to-day first by one, then by another, surely *you* might have some pity on me. Oh! oh! oh! oh!"

"Nay, nay," cried Griffith all in a flutter: "I'll go without more words; as I am a gentleman I will sleep at Bolton this night, and will do my duty to the dead and the living. Don't you cry, sweetest: I give in. I find I have no will but yours."

The next moment they were cantering side by side, and never drew rein till they reached the cross roads.

"Now tell me one thing," stammered Griffith with a most ghastly attempt at cheerful indifference, "how — do you — happen to be — on George Neville's horse?"

Kate had been expecting this question for some time, yet she colored high when it did come. However, she had her answer pat. The horse was in the stable-yard, and fresh: her own was tired. "What was I to do, Griffith? And now," added she hastily, "the sun will soon set, and the roads are bad: be careful. I wish I could ask you to sleep at our house; but — there are reasons" — she hesitated; she could not well tell him George Neville was to dine and sleep there.

Griffith assured her there was no danger; his mare knew every foot of the way.

They parted; Griffith rode to Bolton; and Kate rode home.

It was past dinner-time. She ran up-stairs and hurried on her best gown and her diamond comb. For she began to quake now at the prank she had played with her guest's horse: and Nature taught her that the best way to soften censure is — to be beautiful.

—— On pardonne tout aux belles.

And certainly she was passing fair; and queenly with her diamond comb.

She came down-stairs, and was received by her father; he grumbled at being kept waiting for dinner.

Kate easily appeased the good-natured squire, and then asked what had become of Mr. Neville.

"Oh, he is gone long ago: remembered, all of a sudden, he had promised to dine with a neighbor."

Kate shook her head sceptically, but said nothing. But a good minute after, she inquired, "How did he go? on foot?"

The squire did not know.

After dinner old Joe sought an interview, and was admitted into the dining-room.

"Be it all right about the gray horse, master?"

"What of him?" asked Kate.

"He be gone to Neville Court, mistress. But I suppose (with a horrid leer) it is all right. Muster Neville told me all about it. He said, says he, 'Some do break a kine or the likes on these here jyful occasions; other some do exchange goold rings. Your young mistress and me, *we* exchange nags. She takes my pieball; I take her gray;' says he. 'Saddle him for me, Joe,' says he, 'and wish me jy.' So I clapped Muster Neville's saddle on the gray, and a gave me a goolden guinea a did, and I was so struck of a heap I let un go without wishing on him jy; but I hollered it arter un, as hard as I could. How you looks! It be all right, baint it?"

Squire Peyton laughed heartily, and said he concluded it was all right: "The piebald," said he, "is rising five, and *I've* had the gray ten years. We have got the sunny side of that bargain, Joe." He gave Joe a glass of wine and sent him off, inflated with having done a good stroke in horseflesh.

As for Kate she was red as fire, and kept her lips close as wax; not a word could be got out of her. The less she said, the more she thought. She was thoroughly vexed, and sore perplexed how to get her gray horse back from such a man as George Neville; and yet she could not help laughing at the trick, and secretly admiring this chevalier, who had kept his mortification to himself, and parried an affront so gallantly.

"The good-humored wretch!" said she to herself. "If Griffith ever goes away again, he will have me, whether I like or no. No lady could resist the monster long without some other man at hand to help her."

CHAPTER V.

As, when a camel drops in the desert, vultures, hitherto unseen, come flying from the horizon, so Mr. Charlton had no sooner succumbed, than the air darkened with undertakers flocking to Bolton for a lugubrious job. They rode up on black steeds, they crunched the gravel in grave gigs, and sent in black-edged cards to Griffith, and lowered their voices, and bridled their briskness, and tried hard, poor souls, to be sad: and were horribly complacent beneath that thin japan of venal sympathy.

Griffith selected his Raven, and then sat down to issue numerous invitations.

The idea of eschewing funereal pomp had not yet arisen. A gentleman of that day liked his very remains to make a stir, and did not see the fun of stealing into his grave like a rabbit slipping aground. Mr. Charlton had even left behind him a sealed letter containing a list of the persons he wished to follow him to the grave, and attend the reading of his will. These were thirty-four; and amongst them three known to fame, viz.: George Neville, Esq., Edward Peyton, Esq., and Miss Catherine Peyton.

To all and each of the thirty-four, young Gaunt wrote a formal letter inviting them to pay respect to their deceased friend, and to honor himself, by coming to Bolton Hall at high noon on Saturday next. These letters, in compliance with another custom of the time and place, were all sent by mounted messengers, and the answers came on horseback too: so there was much clattering of hoofs coming and going, and much roasting,

baking, drinking of ale, and bustling; all along of him who lay so still in an upper chamber.

And every man and woman came to Mr. Gaunt to ask his will and advice, however simple the matter: and the servants turned very obsequious, and laid themselves out to please the new master, and retain their old places.

And what with the sense of authority, and the occupation, and growing ambition, love-sick Griffith grew another man, and began to forget that two days ago he was leaving the country and going to give up the whole game.

He found time to send Kate a loving letter, but no talk of marriage in it. He remembered she had asked him to give her time. Well, he would take her advice.

It wanted just three days to the funeral, when Mr. Charlton's own carriage, long unused, was found to be out of repair. Griffith had it sent to the nearest town, and followed it on that and other business. Now it happened to be what the country folk called "justicing day;" and who should ride into the yard of the "Roebuck" but the new magistrate, Mr. Neville; he alighted off a great bony gray horse before Griffith's very nose, and sauntered into a private room.

Griffith looked, and looked, and, scarcely able to believe his senses, followed Neville's horse to the stable, and examined him all round.

Griffith was sore perplexed; and stood at the stable door glaring at the horse; and sick misgivings troubled him. He forgot the business he came about, and went and hung about the bar, and tried to pick up a clew to this mystery. The poor wretch put on a miserable assumption of indifference, and asked one or two of the magistrates, if that was not Mr. Peyton's gray horse young Neville had ridden in upon.

Now amongst these gentlemen was a young squire

Miss Peyton had refused, and galled him. He had long owed Gaunt a grudge for seeming to succeed where he had notably failed, and, now, hearing him talk so much about the gray, he smelt a rat. He stepped into the parlor and told Neville Gaunt was fuming about the gray horse, and questioning everybody. Neville, though he put so bold a face on his recent adventure at Peyton Hall, was secretly smarting, and quite disposed to sting Gaunt in return. He saw a tool in this treacherous young squire — his name was Galton — and used him accordingly.

Galton, thoroughly primed by Neville, slipped back, and, choosing his opportunity, poisoned Griffith Gaunt.

And this is how he poisoned him. "Oh," said he, "Neville has bought the gray nag; and cost him dear, it did." Griffith gave a sigh of relief; for he at once concluded old Peyton had sold his daughter's very horse. He resolved to buy her a better next week with Mr. Charlton's money.

But Galton, who was only playing with him, went on to explain that Neville had paid a double price for the nag; he had given Miss Peyton his piebald horse in exchange, and his troth into the bargain. In short, he lent the matter so adroit a turn, that the exchange of horses seemed to be Kate's act as much as Neville's, and the inference inevitable.

"It is a falsehood," gasped Griffith.

"Nay," said Galton, "I had it on the best authority; but you shall not quarrel with me about it; the lady is nought to me, and I but tell the tale as 'twas told to me."

"Then who told it you?" said Gaunt sternly.

"Why, it is all over the county, for that matter."

"No subterfuges, sir. I am the lady's servant, and you know it: this report it slanders her, and insults me:

give me the author, or I'll lay my hunting-whip on your bones."

"Two can play at that game," said Galton; but he turned pale at the prospect of the pastime.

Griffith strode towards him, black with ire.

Then Galton stammered out: "It was Neville himself told me."

"Ah!" said Griffith, "I thought so. He is a liar and a coward."

"I would not advise you to tell *him* so," said the other, maliciously: "he has killed his man in France. Spitted him like a lark."

Griffith replied by a smile of contempt.

"Where is the man?" said he, after a pause.

"How should I know?" asked Galton, innocently.

"Where did you leave him five minutes ago?"

Galton was dumfounded at this stroke; and could find nothing to say.

And now, as often happens, the matter took a turn not in the least anticipated by the conspirators. "You must come with me, sir, if you please," said Griffith, quietly: and he took Galton's arm.

"Oh, with all my heart," said the other; "but, Mr. Gaunt, do not you take these idle reports to heart. *I* never do. What the devil — where are you carrying me to? For Heaven's sake let this foolish business go no farther."

For he found Griffith was taking him to the very room where Neville was.

Griffith deigned no reply: but just opened the door of the room in question, and walked the tale-bearer into the presence of the tale-maker. George Neville rose and confronted the pair with a vast appearance of civility; but under it a sneer was just discernible.

The rivals measured each other from head to foot, and

then Neville inquired to what he owed the honor of this visit.

Griffith replied: "He tells me you told him Miss Peyton has exchanged horses with you." — "Oh! you indiscreet person," said George, shaking his finger playfully at Galton. — "And by the same token has plighted her troth to you."

"Worse and worse," said George. "Galton, I'll never trust you with any secrets again. Besides, you exaggerate."

"Come, sir," said Griffith, sternly: "this Ned Galton was but your tool, and your mouth-piece; and therefore I bring him here to witness my reply to *you:* Mr. George Neville, you are a liar and a scoundrel."

George Neville bounded to his feet like a tiger. "I'll have your life for those two words," he cried.

Then he suddenly governed himself by a great effort. "It is not for me to bandy foul terms with a Cumberland savage," said he. "Name your time and place."

"I will. Ned Galton, you may go. I wish to say a few words in private to Mr. Neville."

Galton hesitated. "No violence, gentlemen: consider."

"Nonsense," said Neville. "Mr. Gaunt and I are going to fight: we are not going to brawl. Be so good as to leave us."

"Ay," said Griffith: "and if you repeat a word of all this, woe be to your skin."

As soon as he was gone, Griffith Gaunt turned very grave and calm, and said to George Neville, "The Cumberland savage has been better taught than to expose the lady he loves to gossiping tongues."

Neville colored up to the eyes at this thrust.

Griffith continued, "The least you can do is to avoid fresh scandal."

"I shall be happy to co-operate with you so far," said

Neville, stiffly. "I undertake to keep Galton silent: and for the rest, we have only to name an early hour for meeting, and confide it to but one discreet friend apiece who will attend us to the field. Then there will be no gossip, and no bumpkins nor constables breaking in — such things have happened in this county, I hear."

It was Wednesday. They settled to meet on Friday at noon on a hillside between Bolton and Neville's Court. The spot was exposed; but so wild and unfrequented that no interruption was to be feared. Mr. Neville being a practised swordsman, Gaunt chose pistols; a weapon at which the combatants were supposed to be pretty equal. To this Neville very handsomely consented.

By this time a stiff and elaborate civility had taken the place of their heat, and at parting they bowed both long and low to each other.

Griffith left the inn and went into the street. And, as soon as he got there, he began to realize what he had done, and that in a day or two he might very probably be a dead man. The first thing he did was to go with sorrowful face and heavy step to Mr. Houseman's office.

Mr. Houseman was a highly respectable solicitor. His late father and he had long enjoyed the confidence of the gentry, and this enabled him to avoid litigious business, and confine himself pretty much to the more agreeable and lucrative occupation of drawing wills, settlements, and conveyances; and effecting loans, sales, and transfers. He visited the landed proprietors, and dined with them, and was a great favorite in the county.

"Justicing day" brought him many visits; so on that day he was always at his place of business. Indeed, a client was with him when Griffith called, and the young

gentleman had to wait in the outer office for full ten minutes.

Then the door opened, and the client in question came out, looking mortified and anxious. It was Squire Peyton. At sight of Gaunt, who had risen to take his vacant place, Kate's father gave him a stiff nod, and an unfriendly glance, then hurried away.

Griffith was hurt at his manner. He knew very well Mr. Peyton looked higher for his daughter than Griffith Gaunt: but for all that the old gentleman had never shown him any personal dislike or incivility until this moment.

So Griffith could not but fear that Neville was somehow at the bottom of this, and that the combination was very strong against him. Now in thus interpreting Mr. Peyton's manner, he fell into a very common error and fruitful cause of misunderstanding. We go and fancy that everybody is thinking of *us*. But he is not: he is like us; he is thinking of himself.

"Well, well," thought Griffith, "if I am not to have her, what better place for me than the grave?"

He entered Mr. Houseman's private room, and opened his business at once.

But a singular concurrence of circumstances induced Lawyer Houseman to confide to a third party the substance of what passed between this young gentleman and himself. So, to avoid repetition, the best way will be to let Houseman tell this part of my tale instead of me: and I only hope his communication, when it comes, may be half as interesting to my reader as it was to his hearer.

Suffice it for me to say that lawyer and client were closeted a good hour; and were still conversing together, when a card was handed in to Mr. Houseman that seemed to cause him both surprise and pleasure. "In five

minutes," said he to the clerk. Griffith took the hint, and bade him good-by directly.

As he went out, the gentleman who had sent in his card rose from a seat in the outer office to go in.

It was Mr. George Neville.

Griffith Gaunt and he saluted and scanned each other curiously. They little thought to meet again so soon. The clerks saw nothing more than two polite gentlemen passing each other.

The more Griffith thought of the approaching duel, the less he liked it. He was an impulsive man for one thing; and, with such, a cold fit naturally succeeds a hot one. And, besides, as his heat abated, reason and reflection made themselves heard, and told him that in a contest with a formidable rival he was throwing away an advantage: after all, Kate had shown him great favor; she had ridden Neville's horse after him, and made him resign his purpose of leaving her; surely then she preferred him on the whole to Neville; yet he must go and risk his chance of possessing her — upon a personal encounter, in which Neville was at least as likely to kill him, as he to kill Neville. He saw too late that he was playing his rival's game. He felt cold and despondent, and more and more convinced that he should never marry Kate, but that she would very likely bury him.

With all this he was too game to recoil, and indeed he hated his rival too deeply. So, like many a man before him, he was going doggedly to the field against his judgment, with little to win and all to lose.

His deeper and more solemn anxieties were diversified by a lighter one. A few days ago he had invited half the county to bury Mr. Charlton, on Saturday, the nineteenth of February. But now he had gone and fixed Friday the eighteenth for a duel. A fine thing if he should be himself a corpse on Friday afternoon. Who

was to receive the guests? who conduct the funeral?

The man, with all his faults, had a grateful heart: and Mr. Charlton was his benefactor, and he felt he had no right to go and get himself killed until he had paid the last rites to his best friend.

The difficulty admits of course of a comic view, and smells Hibernian: but these things seem anything but droll to those whose lives and feelings are at stake: and indeed there was something chivalrous and touching in Griffith's vexation at the possibility of his benefactor being buried without due honors, owing to his own intemperate haste to be killed. He resolved to provide against that contingency: so, on the Thursday he wrote an urgent letter to Mr. Houseman, telling him he must come early to the funeral, and be prepared to conduct it.

This letter was carried to Mr. Houseman's office at three o'clock on Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Houseman was not at home. He was gone to a country-house nine miles distant. But Griffith's servant was well mounted, and had peremptory orders, so he rode after Mr. Houseman, and found him at Mr. Peyton's house; whither, if you please, we too will follow him.

In the first place you must know that the real reason why Mr. Peyton looked so savage, coming out of Mr. Houseman's office, was this: Neville had said no more about the hundred pounds: and indeed had not visited the house since; so Peyton, who had now begun to reckon on this sum, went to Houseman to borrow it. But Houseman politely declined to lend it him, and gave excellent reasons. All this was natural enough; common enough: but the real reason why Houseman declined, was a truly singular one. The fact is, Catherine Peyton had made him promise to refuse.

Between that young lady and the Housemans, husband

and wife, there was a sincere friendship founded on mutual esteem; and Catherine could do almost what she liked with either of them. Now, whatever might be her faults, she was a proud girl, and an intelligent one: it mortified her pride to see her father borrowing here, and borrowing there, and unable to repay: and she had also observed that he always celebrated a new loan by a new extravagance, and so was never a penny the richer for borrowed money. He had inadvertently let fall that he should apply to Houseman. She raised no open objection, but just mounted Piebald, and rode off to Houseman, and made him solemnly promise not to lend her father a shilling.

Houseman kept his word; but his refusal cost him more pain than he had counted on when he made the promise. Squire Peyton had paid him thousands first and last; and, when he left Houseman's room, with disappointment, mortification, and humiliation, deeply marked on his features, usually so handsome and jolly, the lawyer felt sorry and ashamed — and did *not* show it.

But it rankled in him; and the very next day he took advantage of a little business he had to do in Mr. Peyton's neighborhood, and drove to Peyton Hall and asked for Mistress Kate.

His was a curious errand. Indeed, I think it would not be easy to find a parallel to it.

For here was an attorney calling upon a beautiful girl to do what?

To soften her.

On a daughter; to do what?

To persuade her to permit him to lend her father one hundred pounds on insufficient security.

Well, he reminded her of his ancient obligations to her family, and assured her he could well afford to risk a hundred or even a thousand pounds. He then told her

that her father had shown great pain at his refusal, and that he himself was human, and could not divest himself of gratitude, and pity, and good nature — all for one hundred pounds. "In a word," said he, "I have brought the money; and you must give in for this once, and let me lend it him without more ado."

Miss Peyton was gratified and affected; and a tear trembled a moment in her eye; but went in-doors again and left her firm as a rock sprinkled with dew. She told him she could quite understand his feeling, and thanked him for it: but she had long and seriously weighed the matter, and could not release him from his promise. "No more of this base borrowing," said she, and clenched her white teeth indomitably.

He attacked her with a good many weapons; but she parried them all so gently, yet so nobly, and so successfully, that he admired her more than ever.

Still, lawyers fight hard and die very hard. Houseman got warm in his cause, and cross-examined this defendant, and asked her whether *she* would refuse to lend her father one hundred pounds out of a full purse.

This question was answered only by a flash of her glorious eyes, and a magnificent look of disdain at the doubt implied.

"Well, then," said Houseman, "be your father's surety for repayment with interest at six per centum; and then there will be nothing in the business to wound your dignity. I have many hundreds out at six per centum."

"Excuse me: that would be dishonest," said Kate; "I have no money to repay you with."

"But you have expectations."

"Nay, not I."

"I beg your pardon."

"Methinks I should know, sir. What expectations have I? and from whom?"

Houseman fidgeted on his seat; and then with some hesitation replied, "Well, from two that I know of."

"You are jesting, methinks, good Mr. Houseman," said she reproachfully.

"Nay, dear Mistress Kate, I wish you too well to jest on such a theme."

The lawyer then fidgeted again on his seat in silence, sign of an inward struggle; during which Kate's eye watched him with some curiosity. At last his wavering balance inclined towards revealing something or other.

"Mistress Kate," said he, "my wife and I are both your faithful friends and humble admirers: we often say you would grace a coronet: and wish you were as rich as you are good and beautiful."

Kate turned her lovely head away, and gave him her hand. That incongruous movement, so full of womanly grace and feeling, and the soft pressure of her white hand, completed her victory, and the remains of Houseman's reserve melted away.

"Yes, my dear young lady," said he, warmly, "I have good news for you: only, mind, not a living soul must ever know it from your lips. Why, I am going to do for you what I never did in my life before; going to tell you something that passed yesterday in my office. But then I know you: you are a young lady out of a thousand: I can trust you to be discreet and silent; can I not?"

"As the grave."

"Well, then, my young mistress — in truth it was like a play, though the scene was but a lawyer's office" —

"Was it?" cried Kate. "Then you set me all of a flutter: you must sup here and sleep here. Nay, nay," said she, her eyes sparkling with animation, "I'll take no denial. My father dines abroad: we shall have the house to ourselves."

Her interest was keenly excited: but she was a true

woman, and must coquet with her very curiosity; so she ran off to see with her own eyes that sheets were aired, and a roasting fire lighted in the blue bedroom for her guest.

While she was away, a servant brought in Griffith Gaunt's letter, and a sheet of paper had to be borrowed to answer it.

The answer was hardly written and sent out to Griffith's servant, when supper and the fair hostess came in almost together.

After supper fresh logs were heaped on the fire, and the lawyer sat in a cosey arm-chair, and took out his diary, and several papers, as methodically as if he was going to lay the case by counsel before a judge of assize.

Kate sat opposite him with her gray eyes beaming on him all the time, and searching for the hidden meaning of everything he told her. During the recital which follows, her color often came and went, but those wonderful eyes never left the narrator's face a moment.

They put the attorney on his mettle, and he elaborated the matter more than I should have done: he articulated his topics; marked each salient fact by a long pause. In short, he told his story like an attorney, and not like a Romancist. I cannot help that, you know; I'm not Procrustes.

MR. HOUSEMAN'S LITTLE NARRATIVE.

"Wednesday, the seventeenth day of February, at about one of the clock, called on me at my place of business Mr. Griffith Gaunt, whom I need not here describe, inasmuch as his person and place of residence are well known to the court — what am I saying? — I mean, well known to yourself, Mistress Kate.

"The said Griffith, on entering my room, seemed moved, and, I might say, distempered, and did not give

himself time to salute me, and receive my obeisance, but addressed me abruptly, and said as follows: 'Mr. Houseman, I am come to make my will.'"

"Dear me!" said Kate; then blushed, and was more on her guard.

"I seated the young gentleman, and then replied that his resolution aforesaid did him credit, the young being as mortal as the old. I said further that many disasters had happened, in my experience, owing to the obstinacy with which men in the days of their strength shut their eyes to the precarious tenure under which all sons of Adam hold existence; and so many a worthy gentleman dies in his sins, and, what is worse, dies intestate.

"But the said Griffith interrupted me with some signs of impatience, and asked me bluntly would I draw his will, and have it executed on the spot.

"I assented generally; but I requested him by way of needful preliminary to obtain for me a copy of Mr. Charlton's will, under which, as I have always understood, the said Griffith inherits whatever real estate he hath to bequeath.

"Mr. Griffith Gaunt then replied to me that Mr. Charlton's will was in London, and the exact terms of it could not be known until after the funeral: that is to say, upon the nineteenth instant.

"Thereupon I explained to Mr. Gaunt that I must see and know what properties were devised in the will aforesaid, by the said Charlton, to Gaunt aforesaid, and how devised and described. Without this, I said, I could not correctly and sufficiently describe the same in the instrument I was now requested to prepare.

"Mr. Gaunt did not directly reply to this objection. But he pondered a little while, and then asked me if it were not possible for him, by means of general terms, to bequeath to a sole legatee whatever lands, goods, chattels,

etc., Mr. Charlton might hereafter prove to have devised to him, the said Griffith Gaunt.

"I admitted this was possible, but objected that it was dangerous. I let him know that in matters of law general terms are a fruitful source of dispute, and I said I was one of those who hold it a duty to avert litigation from our clients.

"Thereupon Mr. Gaunt drew out of his bosom a pocket-book.

"The said pocket-book was shown to me by the said Gaunt, and I say it contained a paragraph from a newspaper, which I believe to have been cut out of the said newspaper with a knife, or a pair of scissors, or some trenchant instrument; and the said paragraph purported to contain an exact copy of a certain will and testament under which (as is, indeed, matter of public notoriety) one Dame Butcher hath inherited and now enjoys the lands, goods, and chattels of a certain merry parson late deceased in these parts; and, *I believe*, little missed.

"Mr. Gaunt would have me read the will and testament aforesaid; and I read it accordingly; and, inasmuch as bad things are best remembered, the said will and testament did, by its singularity and profaneness, fix itself forthwith in my memory; so that I can by no means dislodge it thence, do what I may.

"The said document, to the best of my memory and belief, runneth after this fashion: 'I, John Raymond, clerk, at present residing at Whitbeck, in the county of Cumberland, being a man sound in body, mind, and judgment, do deliver this as my last will and testament.

"'I give and bequeath all my real property, and all my personal property, and all the property whether real or personal I may hereafter possess, or become entitled to, to my housekeeper, Janet Butcher.

"'And I appoint Janet Butcher my sole executrix, and

I make Janet Butcher my sole residuary legatee, save and except that I leave my solemn curse to any knave, who hereafter shall at any time pretend that he does not understand the meaning of this my will and testament.'"

(Catherine smiled a little at this last bequest.)

"Mr. Gaunt then solemnly appealed to me as an honest man to tell him whether the aforesaid document was bad, or good, in law.

"I was fain to admit that it was sufficient in law; but I qualified, and said I thought it might be attacked on the score of the Hussy's undue influence, and the Testator's apparent insanity. Nevertheless, I concluded candidly that neither objection would prevail in our courts, owing to the sturdy prejudice in the breasts of English jurymen, whose ground of faith it is that every man has a right to do what he will with his own, and even to do it how he likes.

"Mr. Gaunt did speedily abuse this my candor. He urged me to lose no time, but to draw his will according to the form and precedent in that case made and provided by this mad parson; and my clerks forsooth were to be the witnesses thereof.

"I refused, with some heat, to sully my office by allowing such an instrument to issue therefrom; and I asked the said Gaunt, in high dudgeon, for what he took me.

"Mr. Gaunt then offered, in reply, two suggestions that shook me. *Imprimis,* he told me the person to whom he now desired to leave his all was Mistress Catherine Peyton. [An ejaculation from Kate.] *Secundo,* he said he would go straight from me to that coxcomb Harrison were I to refuse to serve him in the matter.

"On this, having regard to your interest and my own, I temporized: I offered to let him draw a will after his parson's precedent, and I agreed it should be witnessed

in my office; only I stipulated that next week a proper document should be drawn by myself, with due particulars, on two sheets of paper, and afterwards engrossed and witnessed; and to this Mr. Gaunt assented, and immediately drew his will according to newspaper precedent.

"But, when I came to examine his masterpiece, I found he had taken advantage of my pliability to attach an unreasonable condition; to wit, that the said Catherine should forfeit all interest under this will in case she should ever marry a certain party therein nominated, specified, and described."

("Now that was Griffith all over," cried Catherine, merrily.)

"I objected stoutly to this. I took leave to remind the young gentleman that, when a Christian man makes his last will and testament, he should think of the grave and of the place beyond whither we may carry our affections, but must leave the bundle of our hates behind, the gate being narrow. I even went so far as to doubt whether such a proviso could stand in *law;* and I also put a practical query: what was to hinder the legatee from selling the property, and diverting the funds, and then marrying whom she liked?

"Mr. Gaunt was deaf to reason. He bade me remember that he was neither saint nor apostle, but a poor gentleman of Cumberland, who saw a stranger come between him and his lover dear. With that he was much moved, and did not conclude his argument at all, but broke off, and was fain to hide his face with both hands awhile. In truth, this touched me; and I looked another way, and began to ask myself why should I interfere, who, after all, know not your heart in the matter; and, to be brief, I withstood him and Parson's law no more; but sent his draft will to the clerks, the

which they copied fair in a trice, and the duplicates were signed and witnessed in red-hot haste, as most of men's follies are done for that matter.

"The paper writing now produced and shown to me — hush! what am I saying? — I mean the paper writing I now produce and show to you is the draft of the will aforesaid, in the handwriting of the testator."

And with this he handed Kate Peyton Griffith Gaunt's will, and took a long and satirical pinch of snuff while she examined it.

Miss Peyton took the will in her white hands, and read it. But, in reading it, she held it up, and turned it so that her friend could not see her face while she read it, but only her white hands, in which the document rustled a little.

It ran thus: —

"I, Griffith Gaunt, late of the Eyrie, and now residing at Bolton Hall, in the county of Cumberland, being sound in body and mind, do deliver this as my last will and testament. I give and bequeath all the property, real or personal, which I now possess or may hereafter become entitled to, to my dear friend and mistress, Catherine Peyton, daughter of Edward Peyton, Esquire, of Peyton Hall; provided always that the said Catherine Peyton shall at no time within the next ten years marry George Neville, of Neville's Court, in this county. But should the said Catherine marry the said George within ten years of this day, then I leave all my said property, in possession, remainder, or reversion, to my heir-at-law."

The fair legatee read this extraordinary testament more than once. At last she handed it back to Mr. Houseman without a word. But her cheek was red, and her eyes glistening.

Mr. Houseman was surprised at her silence, and, as he was curious to know her heart, he sounded her: asked her what she thought of that part of his story. But she

evaded him with all the tact of her sex. "What, that is not all then?" said she quickly.

Houseman replied that it was barely half.

"Then tell me all, pray tell me all," said Kate earnestly.

"I am here to that end," said Houseman, and recommenced his narrative.

"The business being done to Mr. Gaunt's satisfaction, though not to mine, we fell into some friendly talk; but in the midst of it my clerk Thomas brought me in the card of a gentleman whom I was very desirous to secure as a client.

"Mr. Gaunt I think read my mind, for he took leave of me forthwith. I attended him to the door, and then welcomed the gentleman aforesaid. It was no other than Mr. George Neville.

"Mr. Neville, after such gracious civilities as his native breeding and foreign travel have taught him, came to business and requested me — to draw his will."

"La!" said Kate.

"I was a little startled, but did it, and took his instructions. This done, I requested to see the title-deeds of his estates, with a view to describing them, and he went himself to the banker's for them, and placed them in my hands.

"I then promised to have the will ready in a week or ten days. But Mr. Neville, with many polite regrets for hurrying me, told me upon his honor he could give me but twenty-four hours. 'After that,' said he, 'it might be too late.'"

("Ah!" said Miss Peyton.)

"Determined to retain my new client, I set my clerks to work, and this very day was engrossed, signed, and witnessed, the last will and testament of George Neville, Esq., of Neville's Court, in the county of Cumberland, and Leicester Square, London, where he hath a noble mansion.

"Now as to the general disposition of his lands, manorial rights, messuages, tenements, goods, chattels, etc., and his special legacies to divers ladies and gentlemen and domestic servants, these I will not reveal even to you.

"The paper I now produce is a copy of that particular bequest which I have decided to communicate to you in strict and sacred confidence."

And he handed her an extract from George Neville's will.

Miss Peyton then read what follows : —

"And I give and bequeath to Mistress Catherine Peyton of Peyton Hall in the said county of Cumberland in token of my respect and regard all that my freehold estate called Moulton Grange with the messuage or tenement standing and being thereon and the farmyard buildings and appurtenances belonging thereto containing by estimation three hundred and seventy-six acres three roods and five perches be the same little more or less to hold to her the said Catherine Peyton her heirs and assigns forever."

The legatee laid down the paper, and leaned her head softly on her fair hand, and her eyes explored vacancy.

"What means all this ?" said she, aloud, but to herself.

Mr. Houseman undertook the office of interpreter. "Means ? why, that he has left you one of the snuggest estates in the county. 'Tis not quite so large as Bolton ; but lies sunnier, and the land richer. Well, mistress, was I right, are you not good for a thousand pounds ?"

Kate, still manifestly thinking of something else, let fall, as it were, out of her mouth that Mr. Gaunt and Mr. Neville were both men in the flower of their youth, and how was she the richer for their folly ?

"Why," said Houseman, "you will not have to wait for the death of these testators — Heaven forbid ! — But

what does all this making of wills show me? That both these gentlemen are deep in love with you, and you can pick and choose: I say you can wed with Bolton Hall or Neville's Court to-morrow: so prithee let the squire have his hundred pounds, and do you repay me at your leisure."

Miss Peyton made no reply, but leaned her exquisite head upon her hand and pondered.

She did not knit her brows, nor labor visibly at the mental oar: yet a certain reposeful gravity and a fixity of the thoughtful eye showed she was applying all the powers of her mind.

Mr. Houseman was not surprised at that: his own wife had but little intellect; yet had he seen her weigh two rival bonnets in mortal silence, and with all the seeming profundity of a judge on the bench. And now this young lady was doubtless weighing farms with similar gravity, care, and intelligence.

But as this continued and still she did not communicate her decision, he asked her point-blank which of the two she settled to wed: Neville's Court, or Bolton Grange.

Thus appealed to, Miss Peyton turned her great eye on him without really looking at him, and replied, "You have made me very uneasy."

He stared. She relapsed into thought a moment, and then, turning to Houseman, asked him how *he* accounted for those two gentlemen making their wills; they were very young to make their wills all of a sudden.

"Why," said Houseman, "Mr. Neville is a man of sense, and every man of sense makes his will; and, as for Mr. Gaunt, he has just come into prospect of an estate; that's why."

"Ah, but why could not Griffith wait till after the funeral?"

"Oh, clients are always in a hurry."

"So you see nothing in it? nothing alarming I mean?"

"Nothing very alarming. Two landed proprietors in love with you; that is all."

"But, dear Mr. Houseman, that is what makes me uneasy: at this rate they must look on one another as — as — rivals: and you know rivals are sometimes enemies."

"Oh, I see now," said Houseman: "you apprehend a quarrel between the gentlemen. Of course there is no love lost between them; but they met in my office and saluted each other with perfect civility. I saw them with my own eyes."

"Indeed! I am glad to hear that; very glad. I hope it was only a coincidence then, their both making their wills."

"Nothing more, you may depend: neither of them knows from me what the other has done; nor ever will."

"That is true," said Kate, and seemed considerably relieved.

To ease her mind entirely, Houseman went on to say that as to the report that high words had passed between the clients in question, at the Roebuck, he had no doubt it was exaggerated. "Besides," said he, "that was not about a lady; I'm told it was about a horse. Some bet belike."

Catherine uttered a faint cry. "About a horse!" said she. "Not about a gray horse?"

"Nay, that is more than I know."

"High words about a horse," said Catherine; "and they are making their wills. Oh! my mind misgave me from the first." And she turned pale. Presently she clasped her hands together. "Mr. Houseman!" she cried, "what shall I do? What, do you not see that both their lives are in danger? and that is why they make their wills. And how should *both* their lives be in danger, but from each other? Madmen! they have quarrelled:

they are going to fight; fight to the death: and I fear it is about me. Me who love neither of them, you know."

"In that case, *let* them fight," said her legal adviser, dispassionately. "Whichever fool gets killed, you will be none the poorer." And the dog wore a sober complacency.

Catherine turned her large eyes on him with horror and amazement, but said nothing.

As for the lawyer he was more struck with her sagacity than with anything. He somewhat overrated it; not being aware of the private reasons she had for suspecting that her two testators were enemies to the death.

"I almost think you are right," said he; "for I got a curious missive from Mr. Gaunt scarce an hour agone, and he says, — let me see what he says." "Nay, let *me* see," said Kate. On that he handed her Griffith's note. It ran thus: —

It is possible I may not be able to conduct the funeral. Should this be so, I appoint you to act for me. So then, good Mr. Houseman, let me count on you to be here at nine of the clock. For Heaven's sake fail me not.

Your humble servant,

G. G.

This left no doubt in Kate's mind.

"Now, first of all," said she, "what answer made you to this?"

"What answer should I make? I pledged my word to be at Bolton at nine of the clock."

"Oh, blind!" sighed Kate. "And I must be out of the room. What shall I do? My dear friend, forgive me; I am a wretched girl. I am to blame. I ought to have dismissed them both, or else decided between them. But who would have thought it would go this length? I did not think Griffith was brave enough. Have pity

on me and help me. Stop this fearful fighting." And now the young creature clung to the man of business, and prayed and prayed him earnestly to avert bloodshed.

Mr. Houseman was staggered by this passionate appeal from one who so rarely lost her self-command. He soothed her as well as he could, and said he would do his best; but added, which was very true, that he thought her interference would be more effective than his own. "What care these young bloods for an old attorney? I should fare ill, came I between their rapiers. To be sure, I might bind them over to keep the peace. But Mistress Kate, now be frank with me; then I can serve you better. You love one of these two; that is clear. Which is the man? that I may know what I am about."

For all her agitation Kate was on her guard in some things.

"Nay," she faltered, "I love neither, not to say love them; but I pity him so."

"Which?"

"Both."

"Ay, mistress; but which do you pity most?" asked the shrewd lawyer.

"Whichever shall come to harm for my sake," replied the simple girl.

"You could not go to them to-night, and bring them to reason?" asked she, piteously. She went to the window to see what sort of a night it was; she drew the heavy crimson curtains and opened the window. In rushed a bitter blast laden with flying snow. The window ledges, too, were clogged with snow, and all the ground was white.

Houseman shuddered, and drew nearer to the blazing logs. Kate closed the window with a groan. "It is not to be thought of," said she, "at your age; and not a road to be seen for snow. What shall I do?"

"Wait till to-morrow," said Mr. Houseman. (Procrastination was his daily work, being an attorney.)

"To-morrow!" cried Catherine. "Perhaps even now they have met, and he lies a corpse."

"Who?"

"Whichever it is, I shall end my days in a convent praying for his soul." She wrung her hands while she said this, and still there was no catching her.

Little did the lawyer think to rouse such a storm with his good news. And now he made a feeble and vain attempt to soothe her; and ended by promising to start the first thing in the morning, and get both her testators bound over to keep the peace by noon. With this resolution he went to bed early.

She was glad to be alone at all events.

Now, mind you, there were plenty of vain and vulgar, yet respectable girls, in Cumberland, who would have been delighted to be fought about, even though bloodshed were to be the result. But this young lady was not vain, but proud. She was sensitive, too, and troubled with a conscience. It reproached her bitterly; it told her she had permitted the addresses of two gentlemen, and so mischief had somehow arisen out of her levity. Now her life had been uneventful and innocent; this was the very first time she had been connected with anything like a crime, and her remorse was great; so was her grief; but her fears were greater still. The terrible look Griffith had cast at his rival flashed back on her; so did his sinister words. She felt that if he and Neville met, nothing less than Neville's death or his own would separate them. Suppose that even now one of them lay a corpse! cold and ghastly as the snow that now covered Nature's face.

The agitation of her mind was such that her body could not be still: now she walked the room in violent

distress, wringing her hands; now she kneeled and prayed fervently for both those lives she had endangered; often she flew to the window and looked eagerly out, writhing and rebelling against the network of female custom that entangled her, and would not let her fly out of her cage even to do a good action; to avert a catastrophe by her prayers, or her tears, or her good sense.

And all ended in her realizing that she was a woman, a poor impotent being, born to lie quiet and let things go; at that she wept helplessly.

So wore away the first night of agony this young creature ever knew.

Towards morning, exhausted by her inward struggles, she fell asleep upon a sofa.

But her trouble followed her. She dreamed she was on a horse, hurried along with prodigious rapidity, in a darkened atmosphere, a sort of dry fog; she knew somehow she was being taken to see some awful, mysterious thing. By and by the haze cleared, and she came out upon pleasant, open, sunny fields that almost dazzled her. She passed gates and hedges, too, all clear, distinct, and individual. Presently a voice by her side said "This way!" and her horse seemed to turn of his own accord through a gap, and in one moment she came on a group of gentlemen. It was Griffith Gaunt and two strangers. Then she spoke, and said, —

"But, Mr. Neville?"

No answer was made her; but the group opened in solemn silence, and there lay George Neville on the snow, stark and stiff, with blood issuing from his temple, and trickling along the snow.

She saw distinctly all his well-known features, but they were pinched and sharpened now. And his dark olive skin was turned to bluish white. It was his corpse. And now her horse thrust out his nose and snorted like

a demon. She looked down, and ah! the blood was running at her preternaturally fast along the snow. She screamed, her horse reared high, and she was falling on the blood-stained snow. She awoke screaming, and the sunlight seemed to rush in at the window.

Her joy that it was only a dream overpowered every other feeling at first. She kneeled and thanked God for that.

The next thing was, she thought it might be a revelation of what had actually occurred.

But this chilling fear did not affect her long. Nothing could shake her conviction that a duel was on foot — and indeed the intelligent of her sex do sometimes put this and that together, and spring to a just but obvious inference, in a way that looks to a slower and safer reasoner like divination; but then she knew that yesterday evening both parties were alive. Coupling this with Griffith's broad hint that after the funeral might be too late to make his will, she felt sure that it was this very day the combatants were to meet. Yes, and this very morning, for she knew that gentlemen always fought in the morning.

If her dream was false as to the past, it might be true as to what was at hand. Was it not a supernatural warning sent to her in mercy? The history of her church abounded in such dreams and visions; and indeed the time and place she lived in were rife with stories of the kind; one, in particular, of recent date.

This thought took hold of her, and grew on her, till it overpowered even the diffidence of her sex; and then up started her individual character; and now nothing could hold her. For, languid and dreamy in the common things of life, this Catherine Peyton was one of those who rise into rare ardor and activity in such great crises as seem to benumb the habitually brisk, and they turn tame and passive.

She had seen at a glance that Houseman was too slow and apathetic for such an emergency; she resolved to act herself. She washed her face and neck and arms and hands in cold water, and was refreshed and invigorated. She put on her riding-habit and her little gold spur; Griffith Gaunt had given it her; and hurried into the stable-yard.

Old Joe and his boy had gone away to breakfast. He lived in the village.

This was unlucky. Catherine must wait his return and lose time, or else saddle the horse herself. She chose the latter. The piebald was a good horse, but a fidgety one; so she saddled and bridled him at his stall. She then led him out to the stone steps in the stable-yard, and tried to mount him; but he sidled away; she had nobody to square him, and she could get nothing to mount but his head. She coaxed him, she tickled him on the other side with her whip. It was all in vain.

It was absurd, but heart-sickening. She stared at him with wonder that he could be so cruel as to play the fool when every minute might be life or death. She spoke to him, she implored him piteously; she patted him. All was in vain.

As a last resource she walked him back to the stable and gave him a sieveful of oats, and set it down by the corn bin for him, and took an opportunity to mount the bin softly.

He ate the oats, but with retroverted eye watched her. She kept quiet and affected nonchalance till he became less cautious: then suddenly sprang on him, and taught him to set his wit against a woman's. My lord wheeled round directly ere she could get her leg over the pommel and made for the stable door. She lowered her head to his mane and just scraped out without injury; not an inch to spare. He set off at once; but luckily for her she had

often ridden a bare-backed horse. She sat him for the first few yards by balance; then reined him in quietly, and soon whipped her left foot into the stirrup and her right leg over the pommel; and then the piebald nag had to pay for his pranks: the roads were clogged with snow, but she fanned him along without mercy, and never drew bridle till she pulled him up drenched, and steaming like a wash-tub, at Netley cross-roads.

Here she halted irresolute: the road to the right led to Bolton, distant two miles and a half. The road in front led to Neville's Court, distant three miles. Which should she take? She had asked herself this a dozen times upon the road; yet could never decide until she got to the place, and *must*. The question was, with which of them had she most influence? She hardly knew; but Griffith Gaunt was her old sweetheart; it seemed somewhat less strange and indelicate to go to him than to the new one: so she turned her horse's head towards Bolton; but she no longer went quite so fast as she had gone before she felt going to either in particular. Such is the female mind.

She reached Bolton at half-past eleven; and now she was there, put a bold face on it; rode up to the door, and, leaning forward on her horse, rang the hall bell.

A footman came to the door.

With composed visage though beating heart, she told him she desired to speak for a moment to Mr. Griffith Gaunt. He asked her would she be pleased to alight: and it was clear by his manner no calamity had yet fallen. "No, no," said Kate, "let me speak to him here."

The servant went in to tell his master. Kate sat quiet with her heart still beating, but glowing now with joy: she was in time, then, thanks to her good horse. She patted him, and made the prettiest excuses aloud to him for riding him so hard through the snow.

The footman came back to say that Mr. Gaunt had gone out.

"Gone out? Whither? On horseback?"

The footman did not know, but would ask within.

While he was gone to inquire, Catherine lost patience, and rode into the stable-yard, and asked a young lout who was lounging there whether his master was gone out on horseback.

The lounging youth took the trouble to call out the groom, and asked him.

The groom said "No," and that Mr. Gaunt was somewhere about the grounds, he thought.

But in the midst of this colloquy one of the maids, curious to see the lady, came out by the kitchen door and courtesied to Kate and told her Mr. Gaunt was gone out walking with two other gentlemen. In the midst of her discourse she recognized the visitor, and having somehow imbibed the notion that Miss Peyton was very likely to be Mrs. Gaunt, and govern Bolton Hall, decided to curry favor with her; so she called her my lady, and was very communicative. She said one of the gentlemen was strange to her; but the other was Dr. Islip from Stanhope town. She knew him well: he had taken off her own brother's leg in a jiffy. "But, dear heart, mistress," said she, "how pale you be. Do come in and have a morsel of meat, and a horn of ale."

"Nay, my good girl," said Kate; "I could not eat; but bring me a mug of new milk if you will. I have not broken my fast this day."

The maid bustled in, and Catherine asked the groom if there were no means of knowing where Mr. Gaunt was. The groom and the boy scratched their heads and looked puzzled. The lounging lout looked at their perplexity, and grinned satirically.

This youth was Tom Leicester, born in wedlock, and

therefore in the law's eye son of old Simon Leicester; but gossips said his true father was the late Captain Gaunt. Tom ran with the hounds for his own sport: went out shooting with gentlemen and belabored the briers for them at twopence per day and his dinner, and abhorred all that sober men call work.

By trade, a beater: profession, a scamp.

Two maids came out together now; one with the milk and a roll, the other with a letter. Catherine drank the milk but could not eat. Then says the other maid, "If so be you are Mistress Peyton, why this letter is for you. Master left it on his table in his bedroom."

Kate took the letter and opened it, all in a flutter. It ran thus: —

SWEET MISTRESS, — When this reaches you, I shall be no more here to trouble you with my jealousy. This Neville set it abroad that you had changed horses with him, as much as to say you had plighted troth with him. He is a liar, and I told him so to his teeth. We are to meet at noon this day: and one must die. Methinks I shall be the one. But, come what may, I have taken care of thee; ask Jack Houseman else. But, oh dear Kate, think of all that hath passed between us, and do not wed this Neville, or I could not rest in my grave. Sweetheart, many a letter have I written thee, but none so sad as this. Let the grave hide my faults from thy memory; think only that I loved thee well. I leave thee my substance; would it were ten times more; and the last thought of my heart.

So no more in this world,
From him that is thy true lover
And humble servant till death.
GRIFFITH GAUNT.

There seems to be room in the mind for only one violent emotion at one instant of time. This touching letter did not just then draw a tear from her who now received it some hours sooner than the writer intended.

Its first effect was to paralyze her. She sat white and trembling, and her great eyes filled with horror. Then she began to scream wildly for help. The men and women came round her.

"Murder! Murder!" she shrieked. "Tell me where to find him, ye wretches, or may his blood be on your heads!"

The scamp bounded from his lounging position and stood before her straight as an arrow. "FOLLOW ME," he shouted. Her gray eyes and the scamp's black ones flashed into one another directly. He dashed out of the yard without another word.

And she spurred her horse, and clattered out after him.

He ran as fast as her horse could canter, and soon took her all round the house: and, while he ran, his black, gypsy eyes were glancing in every direction.

When they got to the lawn at the back of the house, he halted a moment, and said quietly, "Here they be." He pointed to some enormous footsteps in the snow and bade her notice that they commenced at a certain glass door belonging to the house, and that they all pointed outwards. The lawn was covered with such marks, but the scamp followed those his intelligence had selected, and they took him through a gate, and down a long walk, and into the park. Here no other feet had trodden that morning except those Tom Leicester was following. "This is our game," said he. "See, there be six footsteps; and, now I look, this here track is Squire Gaunt's. I know his foot in the snow among a hundred. Bless your heart, I've often been out shooting with Squire Gaunt, and lost him in the woods, and found him again by tracking him on dead leaves, let alone snow. I say, wasn't they useless idiots? couldn't tell ye how to run into a man, and snow on the ground! Why, you can track a hare to her form and a rat to his hole—let alone

such big game as this, with a hoof like a frying-pan,— in the snow."

"Oh, do not talk; let us make haste," panted Kate.

"Canter away," replied the scamp.

She cantered on, and he ran by her side. "Shall I not tire you?" said she.

The *mauvais sujet* laughed at her. "Tire *me!* not over this ground. Why, I run with the hounds, and mostly always in at the death; but that is not altogether speed: ye see I know Pug's mind. What, don't you know *me?* I'm Tom Leicester. Why, I know you: I say, you're a good-hearted one, you are."

"Oh, no! no!" sighed Kate.

"Nay, but you are," said Tom. "I saw you take Harrowden brook that day, when the rest turned tail; and that is what I call having a good heart: gently, mistress, here, this is full of rabbit holes: I seen Sir Ralph's sorrel mare break her leg in a moment in one of these. Shot her dead that afternoon, a did, and then biled her for the hounds. She'd often followed at their tails; next hunting-day she ran inside their bellies. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't laugh. I am in agony."

"Why, what is up, mistress?" asked the young savage, lowering his voice. "'Murder,' says you; but that means *nought.* The lasses they cry murder if you do but kiss 'em."

"Oh, Tom Leicester, it *is* murder. It's a duel, a fight to the death, unless we are in time to prevent them."

"A jewel!" cried Master Leicester, his eyes glittering with delight. "I never saw a jewel. Don't you hold him in for me, mistress: gallop down this slope as hard as you can pelt; it is grass under foot, and ye can't lose the tracks, and I shall be sure to catch ye in the next field."

The young savage was now as anxious to be in at the

death, as Kate was to save life. As he spoke he gave her horse a whack on the quarter with his stick, and away she went full gallop, and soon put a hundred yards between her and Tom.

The next field was a deep fallow; and the hard furrows reduced her to a trot; and before she got out of it Tom was by her side. "Didn't I tell you?" said he. "I'd run you to Peyton Hall for a pot o' beer."

"Oh, you good, brave, clever boy," said Kate; "how fortunate I am to have you! I think we shall be in time."

Tom was flattered. "Why, you see I am none of Daddy Leicester's breed," said he. "I'm a gentleman's by-blow, if you know what that is."

"I can't say I do," said Kate; "but I know you are very bold and handsome, and swift of foot, and I know my patron saint has sent you to me in my misery, and oh, my lad, if we are in time — what can I do for you? Are you fond of money, Tom?"

"That I be, when I can get it."

"Then you shall have all I have got in the world, if you get me there in time to hinder mischief."

"Come on!" shouted Tom, excited in his turn, and took the lead; and not a word more passed till they came to the foot of a long hill. Then said Tom, "Once we are at the top of this, they can't fight without our seeing 'em. That is Scutchemsee Nob: you can see ten miles all round from there."

At this information Kate uttered an ejaculation, and urged her horse forward.

The first part of this hill, which stood between her and those whose tracks she followed, was grass; then came a strip of turnips; then on the bleak top a broad piece of heather. She soon cantered over the grass, and left Tom so far behind he could not quite catch her in the

turnips. She entered the heather, but here she was much retarded by the snow-drifts, and the ups and downs of the rough place. But she struggled on bravely, still leading.

She fixed her eyes earnestly on the ridge, whence she could cry to the combatants, however distant, and stop the combat.

Now as she struggled on, and Tom came after, panting a little for the first time, suddenly there rose from the crest of the hill two columns of smoke, and the next moment two sharp reports rang through the frosty air.

Kate stopped, and looked round to Tom with a scared, inquiring air.

"Pistols!" yelled Tom behind her.

At that the woman overpowered the heroine, and Kate hid her face and fell to trembling and wailing. Her wearied horse came down to a walk.

Presently up comes Tom. "Don't lose your stomach for that," he panted out. "Gentlefolks do pop at one another all day sometimes, and no harm done."

"Oh, bless you!" cried Kate; "I may yet be in time." She spurred her horse on. He did his best, but ere he had gone twenty yards, he plunged into a cavity hidden by the snow.

While he was floundering there, crack went a single pistol, and the smoke rose and drifted over the hill-top.

"Who—op!" muttered Tom, with horrible sang-froid. "There's one done for this time. Couldn't shoot back, ye see."

At this horrible explanation, Kate sank forward on her horse's mane as if she herself had been killed; and the smoke from the pistol came floating thinner and thinner, and eddied high over her head.

Tom spoke rude words of encouragement to her. She did not even seem to hear them. Then he lost all

patience at her, and clutched her arm to make her hear him. But at this it seemed as if some of his nature passed into her down his arm, for she turned wild directly and urged her horse fiercely up the crest. Her progress was slow at first; but the sun had melted the snow on the Nob or extreme summit. She tore her way through the last of the snow on to the clear piece, then, white as ashes, spurred and lashed her horse over the ridge and dashed in amongst them on the other side. For there they were.

What was the sight that met her eyes ?

That belongs to the male branch of my story, and shall be told forthwith, but in its proper sequence.

CHAPTER VI.

The two combatants came to the field in a very different spirit. Neville had already fought two duels, and been successful in both. He had confidence in his skill, and in his luck. His conscience too was tolerably clear, for he was the insulted person; and if a bullet should remove this dangerous rival from his path, why all the better for him, and all the worse for the fool who had brought the matter to a bloody issue, though the balance of the lady's heart inclined his way.

He came in high spirits, and rode upon Kate Peyton's gray, to sting his adversary, and show his contempt of him.

Not so Griffith Gaunt. His heart was heavy, and foreboded ill. It was his first duel, and he expected to be killed. He had played a fool's game, and he saw it.

The night before the duel he tried hard to sleep: he knew it was not giving his nerves fair play to lie thinking all night. But coy sleep, as usual when most wanted, refused to come. At daybreak the restless man gave it up in despair, and rose and dressed himself. He wrote that letter to Catherine, little thinking it would fall into her hands while he lived. He ate a little toast, and drank a pint of Burgundy, and then wandered listlessly about till Major Rickards, his second, arrived.

That experienced gentleman brought a surgeon with him: Mr. Islip.

Major Rickards deposited a shallow wooden box in the hall; and the two gentlemen sat down to a hearty breakfast.

Griffith took care of his guests, but beyond that spoke scarcely a word; and the surgeon, after a ghastly attempt at commonplaces, was silent too. Major Rickards satisfied his appetite first, and then, finding his companions dumb, set to work to keep up their spirits. He entertained them with a narrative of the personal encounters he had witnessed, and especially of one in which his principal had fallen on his face at the first fire, and the antagonist had sprung into the air, and both had lain dead as door-nails, and never moved, nor even winked, after that single discharge.

Griffith sat under this chilling talk for more than an hour.

At last he rose gloomily, and said it was time to go.

"Got your tools, doctor?" inquired the major.

The surgeon nodded slightly. He was more discreet than his friend.

When they had walked nearly a mile in the snow, the major began to complain. "The devil!" said he; "this is queer walking. My boots are full of water. I shall catch my death."

The surgeon smiled satirically, comparing silent Griffith's peril with his second's.

Griffith took no notice. He went like fortitude plodding to execution.

Major Rickards fell behind, and whispered Mr. Islip: "Don't like his looks; doesn't march like a winner. A job for you or the sexton, you mark my words."

They toiled up Scutchemsee Nob, and when they reached the top, they saw Neville, and his second, Mr. Hammersley, riding towards them. The pair had halters as well as bridles, and dismounting, made their nags fast to a large blackthorn that grew there. The seconds then stepped forward and saluted each other with formal civility.

Griffith looked at the gray horse, and ground his teeth. The sight of the animal in Neville's possession stirred up his hate, and helped to steel his heart. He stood apart, still, pale, and gloomy.

The seconds stepped out fifteen paces, and placed the men. Then they loaded two pair of pistols, and put a pistol in each man's hand.

Major Rickards took that opportunity to advise his principal. "Stand sharp. Keep your arm close to your side. Don't fire too high. How do you feel?"

"Like a man who must die; but will try to die in company."

The seconds now withdrew to their places, and the rivals held their pistols lowered: but fixed their deadly eyes on each other.

The eye, in such a circumstance, is a terrible thing: it is literally a weapon of destruction; for it directs the deadly hand that guides the deadly bullet. Moreover the longer and the more steadily the duellist fixes his eye on his adversary, the less likely he is to miss.

Griffith was very pale, but dogged. Neville was serious, but firm. Both eyed each other unflinchingly.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" asked Neville's second.

"Yes." — "Yes."

"Then," said Major Rickards, "you will fire when I let fall this handkerchief, and not before. Mark me, gentlemen; to prevent mistakes, I shall say 'One — two — three' — and then drop the handkerchief. Now, then, once more, are you quite ready?"

"Yes." — "Yes."

"One — two — three." He dropped the handkerchief, and both gentlemen fired simultaneously. Mr. Neville's hat spun into the air; Griffith stood untouched.

The bullet had passed through Neville's hat, and had actually cut a lane through his magnificent hair.

The seconds now consulted, and it was intimated to Griffith that a word of apology would be accepted by his antagonist.

Griffith declined to utter a syllable of apology.

Two more pistols were given the men.

"Aim lower," said Rickards.

"I mean to," said Griffith.

The seconds withdrew, and the men eyed each other: Griffith dogged and pale, as before, Neville not nearly so self-assured; Griffith's bullet, in grazing him, had produced the effect of a sharp, cold current of air no wider than a knife. It was like death's icy forefinger laid on his head, to mark him for the next shot; as men mark a tree, then come again and fell it.

"One — two — three!"

And Griffith's pistol missed fire, but Neville's went off, and Griffith's arm sank powerless, and his pistol rolled out of his hand. He felt a sharp twinge, and then something trickled down his arm.

The surgeon and both seconds ran to him.

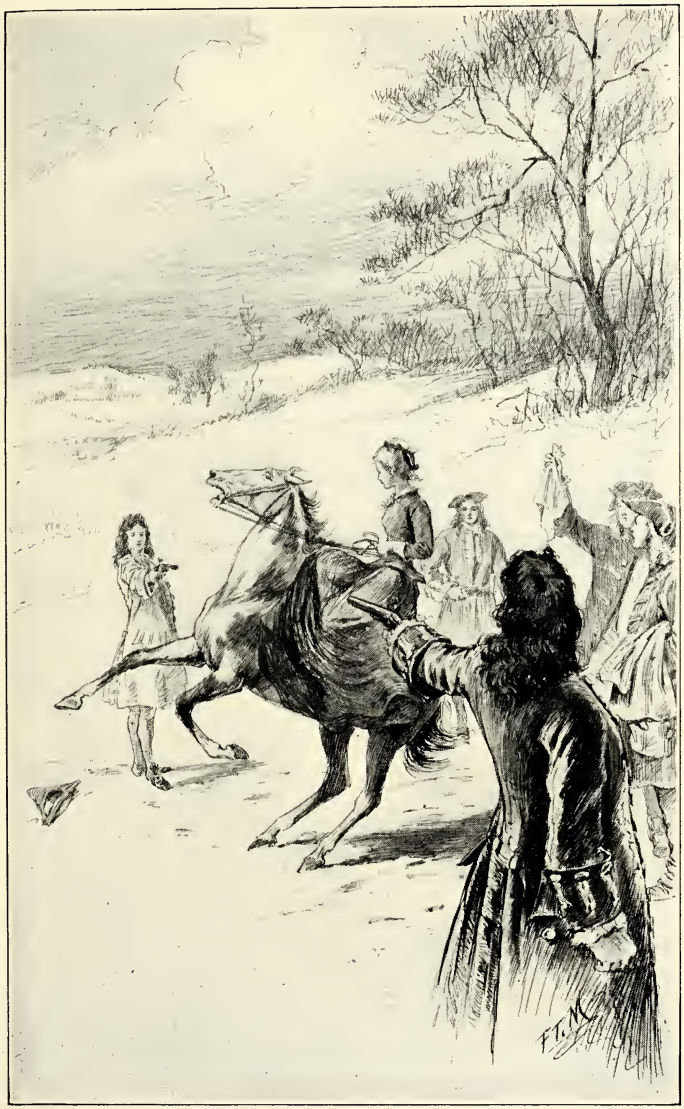
"Nay, it is nothing," said he, "I shoot far better with my left hand than my right. Give me another pistol, and let me have fair play. He has hit me. And now I'll hit him."

Both seconds agreed this was impossible.

"It is the chance of war," said Major Rickards: "you cannot be allowed to take a cool shot at Mr. Neville. If you fire again, so must he."

"The affair may very well end here," said Mr. Hammersley. "I understand there was some provocation on our side; and on behalf of the party insulted I am content to let the matter end, Mr. Gaunt being wounded."

"I demand my second shot to his third," said Griffith sternly; "he will not decline, unless he is a poltroon as well as — what I called him."



RIGHT BETWEEN THE LEVELLED PISTOLS.

The nature of this reply was communicated to Neville, and the seconds, with considerable reluctance, loaded two more pistols; and during the process Major Rickards glanced at the combatants.

Griffith, exasperated by his wound and his jealousy, was wearing out the chivalous courage of his adversary; and the major saw it. His keen eye noticed that Neville was getting restless, and looking confounded at his despised rival's pertinacity: and that Gaunt was more dogged, and more deadly.

"My man will kill yours this time," said he, quietly, to Neville's second. "I can see it in his eye; he is hungry; t'other has had his bellyful."

Once more the men were armed, and the seconds withdrew to their places, intimating that this was the last shot they would allow under any circumstances whatever.

"Are you both ready?"

"Yes." — "Yes."

A faint wail seemed to echo the response.

All heard it, and in that superstitious age believed it to be some mysterious herald of death.

It suspended even Major Rickards's voice a minute. He recovered himself, however, and once more his soldier-like tones rang in the keen air, —

"One" —

There was a great rushing, and a pounding of the hard ground, and a scarlet Amazon galloped in and drew up in the middle, right between the levelled pistols.

Every eye had been so bent on the combatants, that Kate Peyton and her horse seemed to have sprung out of the very earth. And there she sat, pale as ashes, on the steaming piebald, and glanced from pistol to pistol.

The duellists stared in utter amazement, and instinctively lowered their weapons; for she had put herself right in their line of fire, with a recklessness that con-

trasted nobly with her fear for others. In short, this apparition literally petrified them all, seconds as well as combatants.

And, while they stood open-mouthed yet dumb, in came the scamp, and, with a brisk assumption of delegated authority, took Griffith's weapon out of his now unresisting hand; then marched to Neville. He instantly saluted Catherine, and then handed his pistol to her seeming agent, with a high-bred and inimitable air of utter nonchalance.

Kate, seeing them to her surprise so easily disarmed, raised her hands and her lovely eyes to heaven, and in a feeble voice, thanked God and St. Nescioquis.

But very soon that quaint voice quavered away to nothing, and her fair head was seen to droop, and her eyes to close; then her body sank slowly forward like a broken lily; and in another moment she lay fainting on the snow beside her steaming horse.

He never moved, he was so dead beat too.

Oh, lame and impotent conclusion of a vigorous exploit! Masculine up to the crowning point, and then to go and spoil all with "woman's weakness."

"N. B.: This is rote sarcasticul," as Artemus, the delicious, says. Woman's weakness! If Solomon had planned and Samson executed, they could not have served her turn better than this most seasonable swooning did. For lo! at her fall the doughty combatants uttered a yell of dismay, and there was an indiscriminate rush towards the fair sufferer.

But the surgeon claimed his rights: "This is my business," said he authoritatively; "do not crowd on her, gentlemen; give her air."

Whereupon the duellists and seconds stood respectfully aloof in a mixed group, and watched with eager interest and pity.

The surgeon made a hole in the snow and laid his fair patient's head low. "Don't be alarmed," said he; "she has swooned; that is all."

It was all mighty fine to say, Don't be alarmed. But her face was ashy, and her lips the color of lead; and she was so like death, they could not help being terribly alarmed; and now, for the first time, the duellists felt culprits; and, as for fighting, every idea of such a thing went out of their heads; the rivals now were but rival nurses; and never did a lot of women make more fuss over a child, than all these bloodthirsty men did over this Amazon manquée. They produced their legendary lore; one's grandmother had told him burnt feathers were the thing; another, from an equally venerable source, had gathered that those pink palms must be profanely slapped by the horny hand of a man; for at no less a price could resuscitation be obtained. The surgeon scorning all their legends, Griffith and Neville made hasty rushes with brandy and usquebagh; but whether to be taken internally or externally, they did not say, nor indeed know; but only thrust their flasks wildly on the doctor: and he declined them loftily. He melted snow in his hand, and dashed it hard in her face; and put salts close to her pretty little nostrils. And this he repeated many times without effect.

But at last her lips began to turn from lead color to white, and then from white to pink, and her heavenly eyes to open again, and her mouth to murmur things pitiably small and not bearing on the matter in hand.

Her cheek was still colorless, when her consciousness came back, and she found she was lying on the ground with ever so many gentlemen looking at her.

At that, modesty alarmed sent the blood at once rushing to her pale cheek.

A lovely lily seemed turning to a lovely rose before their eyes.

The next thing was, she hid that blushing face in her hands, and began to whimper.

The surgeon encouraged her: "Nay, we are all friends," he whispered, paternally.

She half parted her fingers and peered through them at Neville and Gaunt. Then she remembered all, and began to cry hysterically.

New dismay of sanguinary unprofessionals!

"*Now*, gentlemen, if you will lend me your flasks," said Mr. Islip mighty calmly.

Griffith and Neville were instantly at his side, each with a flask.

The surgeon administered snow and brandy. Kate sipped these, and gulped down her sobs, and at last cried composedly.

But, when it came to sipping brandied snow and crying comfortably, Major Rickards's anxiety gave place to curiosity. Without taking his eye off her he beckoned Mr. Hammersly apart, and whispered, "Who the deuce is it?"

"Don't you know?" whispered the other in return. "Why, Mistress Peyton herself."

"What! the girl it is all about? Well, I never heard of such a thing; the *causa belli* to come *galloping*, and *swooning* on the field of battle, and so stop the fighting! What will our ladies do next? By Heaven, she is worth fighting for though. Which is the happy man, I wonder? She doesn't look at either of them."

"Ah!" said the gentlemen, "that is more than I know, more than Neville knows, more than anybody knows."

"Bet you a guinea *she* knows; and lets it out before she leaves the field," said Major Rickards.

Mr. Hammersley objected to an even bet; but said he would venture one to three she did not. It was an age of bets.

"Done!" said the major.

By this time Kate had risen, with Mr. Islip's assistance, and was now standing with her hand upon the piebald's mane. She saw Rickards and Hammersley were whispering about her, and she felt very uneasy; so she told Mr. Islip timidly she desired to explain her conduct to all the gentlemen present, and avert false reports.

They were soon all about her, and she began with the most engaging embarrassment by making excuses for her weakness. She said she had ridden all the way from home, fasting; *that* was what had upset her. The gentlemen took the cue directly, and vowed eagerly and unanimously it was enough to upset a porter.

"But indeed," resumed Kate, blushing, "I did not come here to make a fuss, and be troublesome; but to prevent mischief, and clear up the strangest misunderstanding between two worthy gentlemen that are, both of them, my good friends."

She paused, and there was a chilling silence; everybody felt she was getting on ticklish ground now. She knew that well enough herself. But she had a good rudder to steer by, called mother-wit.

Says she, with inimitable coolness, "Mr. Gaunt is an old friend of mine, and a little too sensitive where I am concerned. Some chatterbox has been and told him Mr. Neville should say I have changed horses with him; and on that the gossips put their own construction. Mr. Gaunt hears all this, and applies insulting terms to Mr. Neville. Nay, do not deny it, Mr. Gaunt, for I have it here in your own handwriting.

"As for Mr. Neville, he merely defends his honor, and is little to blame. But now I shall tell the true story about these horses, and make you all ashamed of this sorry quarrel.

"Gentlemen, thus it is: A few days ago Mr. Gaunt bade me farewell, and started for foreign parts. He had not been long gone when word came from Bolton that Mr. Charlton was no more. You know how sudden it was. Consider, gentlemen; him dead, and his heir riding off to the Continent in ignorance. So I thought, 'Oh, what shall I do?' Just then Mr. Neville visited me, and I told him; on that he offered me his piebald horse to carry the news after Mr. Gaunt, because my gray was too tired; it was the day we drew Yew-tree Brow, and crossed Harrowden brook, you know" —

Griffith interrupted her: "Stay a bit," said he: "this is news to me. You never told me he had lent you the piebald nag to do me a good turn."

"Did I not?" said Kate, mighty innocently. "Well, but I tell you now. Ask him; he cannot deny it. As for the rest, it was all done in a hurry; Mr. Neville had no horse now to ride home with; he did me the justice to think I should be very ill pleased were he to trudge home afoot and suffer for his courtesy; so he borrowed my gray, to keep him out of the mire; and indeed the ways were fouler than usual, with the rains. Was there any ill in all this? HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE! say I."

The gentlemen all sided loudly with her on this appeal — except Neville, who held his tongue, and smiled at her plausibility; and Griffith, who hung his head at her siding with Neville.

At last he spoke and said sorrowfully: "If you did exchange horses with him, of course I have only to ask his pardon — and go."

Catherine reflected a moment before she replied.

"Well," said she, "I did exchange, and I did not. Why quarrel about a word? certainly he took my horse, and I took his; but it was only for the nonce. Mr. Neville is foreign bred, and an example to us all; he

knows his piebald is worth two of my gray, and so he was too fine a gentleman to send me back my old hunter and ask for his young charger. He waited for me to do that, and, if anybody deserves to be shot, it must be me. But, dear heart, I did not foresee all this fuss; I said to myself, 'La, Mr. Neville will be sure to call on my father or me some day, or else I shall be out on the piebald, and meet him on the gray, and then we can each take our own again.' Was I so far out in my reckoning? Is not that my Rosinante yonder? Here, Tom Leicester, you put my side-saddle on that gray horse, and the man's saddle on the piebald there. — And now, Griffith Gaunt, it is your turn; you must withdraw your injurious terms, and end this superlative folly."

Griffith hesitated.

"Come," said Kate, "consider; Mr. Neville is esteemed by all the county: you are the only gentleman in it who have ever uttered a disparaging word against him. Are you sure you are more free from passion and prejudice, and wiser than all the county? oblige *me*, and do what is right. Come, Griffith Gaunt; let your reason unsay the barbarous words your passion hath uttered against a worthy gentleman, whom we all esteem."

Her habitual influence, and these last words, spoken with gentle and persuasive dignity, turned the scale. Griffith turned to Neville, and said in a low voice that he began to fear he had been hasty, and used harsher words than the occasion justified; he was going to stammer out something more, but Neville interrupted him with a noble gesture: "That is enough, Mr. Gaunt," said he. "I do not feel quite blameless in the matter: and have no wish to mortify an honorable adversary unnecessarily."

"Very handsomely said," put in Major Rickards: "and now let me have a word. I say that both gentlemen

have conducted themselves like men — under fire; and that honor is satisfied, and the misunderstanding at an end. As for my principal here, he has shown he can fight, and now he has shown he can hear reason against himself, when the lips of beauty utter it. I approve his conduct from first to last, and am ready to defend it in all companies, and in the field, should it ever be impugned."

Kate colored with pleasure, and gave her hand eloquently to the major. He bowed over it, and kissed the tips of her fingers.

"Oh! sir," she said, looking on him now as a friend, "I dreamed I saw Mr. Neville lying dead upon the snow, with the blood trickling from his temple."

At this Neville's dark cheek glowed with pleasure. So! it was her anxiety on *his* account had brought her here.

Griffith heard too, and sighed patiently.

Assured by Major Rickards that there neither could nor should be any more fighting, Kate made her adieux, mounted her gray horse, and rode off, discreetly declining all attendance. She beckoned Tom Leicester, however. But he pretended not to see the signal; and let her go alone. His motive for lingering behind was characteristic, and will transpire shortly.

As soon as she was gone, Griffith Gaunt quietly reminded the surgeon that there was a bullet in his arm all this time.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Islip, "I forgot that; I was so taken up with the lady."

Griffith's coat was now taken off, and the bullet searched for: it had entered the fleshy part of his arm below the elbow, and, passing round the bone, projected just under the skin. The surgeon made a slight incision, and then, pressing with his finger and thumb, out it rolled. Griffith put it in his pocket.

Neville had remained out of civility, and now congratulated his late antagonist, and himself, that it was no worse.

The last words that passed between the rivals on this occasion were worth recording, and characteristic of the time.

Neville addressed Gaunt with elaborate courtesy, and to this effect: "I find myself in a difficulty, sir. You did me the honor to invite me to Mr. Charlton's funeral, and I accepted: but now I fear to intrude a guest, the sight of whom may be disagreeable to you. And, on the other hand, my absence might be misconstrued as a mark of disrespect, or of a petty hostility I am far from feeling. Be pleased, therefore, to dispose of me entirely in this matter."

Griffith reflected. "Sir," said he, "there is an old saying, 'Let every tub stand on its own bottom.' The deceased wished you to follow him to the grave, and therefore I would on no account have you absent. Besides, now I think of it, there will be less gossip about this unfortunate business if our neighbors see you under my roof; and treated with due consideration there, as you will be."

"I do not doubt that, sir, from so manly an adversary, and I shall do myself the honor to come." Such was Neville's reply. The rivals then saluted each other profoundly, and parted.

Hammersley and Rickards lingered behind their principals to settle their little bet about Kate's affections: and, by the by, they were indiscreet enough to discuss this delicate matter within a dozen yards of Tom Leicester: they forgot that "little pitchers have long ears."

Catherine Peyton rode slowly home, and thought it all over as she went; and worried herself finely. She was one that winced at notoriety; and she could not hope to

escape it now. How the gossips would talk about her! they would say the gentlemen had fought about *her;* and she had parted them for love of one of them. And then the gentlemen themselves! The strict neutrality she had endeavored to maintain on Scutchemsee Nob, in order to make peace, would it not keep them both her suitors? She foresaw she should be pulled to pieces, and live in hot water, and be "the talk of the county."

There were but two ways out: she must marry one of them, and petition the other one not to shoot him; or else she must take the veil, and so escape them both.

She preferred the latter alternative. She was more enthusiastic in religion than in any earthly thing: and now the angry passions of men thrust her the same road that her own devout mind had always drawn her.

As soon as she got home she sent a message to Father Francis, who drove her conscience, and begged him to come and advise her.

After that, she did the wisest thing, perhaps, she had done all day. Went to bed.

CHAPTER VII.

The sun was just setting when Catherine's maid came into her room and told her Father Francis was below. She sent down to say she counted on his sleeping at Peyton Hall; and she would come down to him in half an hour. She then ordered a refection to be prepared for him in her boudoir; and made her toilet with all reasonable speed, not to keep him waiting. Her face beamed with quiet complacency now: for the holy man's very presence in the house was a comfort to her.

Father Francis was a very stout muscular man, with a ruddy countenance: he never wore gloves, and you saw at once he was not a gentleman by birth. He had a fine voice; it was deep, mellow, and when he chose, sonorous. This, and his person, ample, but not obese, gave him great weight, especially with his female pupils. If he was not quite so much reverenced by the men, yet he was both respected and liked; in fact, he had qualities that make men welcome in every situation: good humor, good sense, and tact. A good son of his Church, and early trained to let no occasion slip of advancing her interests.

I wish my reader could have seen the meeting between Catherine Peyton and this burly ecclesiastic. She came into the drawing-room with that imperious air and carriage which had made her so unpopular with her own sex; and at the bare sight of Father Francis, drooped and bent in a moment as she walked; and her whole body indicated a submissiveness, graceful, but rather abject: it was as if a young poplar should turn to a

weeping willow in half a moment. Thus metamorphosed, the Beauty of Cumberland glided up to Francis, and sank almost to her knee before him, crossed her hands on her bosom, lowered her lovely head, and awaited his benediction.

The father made rapidly the sign of the cross over that thoroughbred head and golden hair, and blessed her business-like.

> The hand of less employment hath the daintier sense.
> — SHAKESPEARE.

Father Francis blessed so many of these pretty creatures every week that he had long outgrown your fine romantic way of blessing a body. (We manage these things better in the theatre.) Then he lent her his hand to rise, and asked her in what she required his direction at present.

"In that which shall decide my whole life," said she.

Francis responded by a look of paternal interest.

"But first," murmured she, "let me confess to you, and obtain absolution, if I may. Ah, father, my sins have been many since last confession."

"Be it so," said Father Francis resignedly. "Confession is the best preface to direction." And he seated himself with a certain change of manner, an easy assumption of authority.

"Nay, father," suggested the lady, "we shall be more private in my room."

"As you will, Mistress Catherine Peyton," said the priest, returning to his usual manner.

So then the fair penitent led her spiritual judge captive up another flight of stairs, and into her little boudoir. A cheerful wood fire crackled and flamed up the chimney, and a cloth had been laid on a side table. Cold turkey and chine graced the board, and a huge glass magnum of

purple Burgundy glowed and shone in the rays of the cheery fire.

Father Francis felt cosey at the sight, and at once accepted Kate's invitation to take some nourishment before entering on the labor of listening to the catalogue of her crimes. "I fasted yesterday," he muttered; and the zeal with which he attacked the viands rendered the statement highly credible. He invited Kate to join him; but she declined.

He returned more than once to the succulent meats, and washed all down with a pint of the fine old Burgundy, perfumed and purple. Meantime she of the laity sat looking into the fire with heavenly-minded eyes.

At last, with a gentle sigh of content, the ghostly father installed himself in an arm-chair, by the fire, and invited his penitent to begin.

She took a footstool and brought it to his side, so that in confessing her blacker vices she might be able to whisper them in his very ear. She kneeled on her little footstool, put her hands across her breast, and in this lowly attitude murmured softly after this fashion, with a contrite voice:

"I have to accuse myself of many vices. Alas! in one short fortnight I have accumulated the wickedness of a life. I have committed the seven deadly sins. I have been guilty of pride, wrath, envy, disobedience, immodesty, vanity, luxury, fibs" —

"Gently, daughter," said the priest quietly; "these terms are too general: give me instances. Let us begin with wrath. Ah, we are all prone to that."

The fair penitent sighed, and said, "Especially me. Example: I was angry beyond reason with my maid, Ruth. (She does comb my hair so uncouthly.) So then the other night, when I was in trouble, and most needed soothing, by being combed womanly, she gets thinking

of Harry that helps in the stable, and she tears away at my hair. I started up, and screamed out, 'Oh, you clumsy thing! go currycomb my horse, and send that oaf your head is running on to handle my hair!' And I told her my grandam would have whipped her well for it; but now-a-days mistresses were the only sufferers: we had lost the use of our hands, we are grown so squeamish; and I stamped like a fury, and said, 'Get you gone out of the room;' and I hated the sight of her. And the poor girl went from me, crying, without a word, being a better Christian than her mistress. *Mea culpa! mea culpa!*"

"Did you slap her?"

"Nay, father, not so bad as that."

"Are you quite sure you did not slap her?" asked Francis quietly.

"Nay; but I had a mind to. My heart slapped her, if my hand forbore. Alas!"

"Had she hurt you?"

"That she did; but only my head. I hurt her heart; for the poor wench loves me dear; the Lord knows for what."

"Humph! Proceed to pride."

"Yes, father. I do confess that I was greatly puffed up with the praises of men. I was proud of the sorriest things: of jumping a brook, when 'twas my horse jumped it, and had jumped it better with a fly on his back than the poor worm me; of my good looks, forgetting that God gave them me; and, besides, I am no beauty when all is done; it is all their flattery. And at my Lady Munster's dinner I pridefully walked out before Mistress Davies, the rich cheesemonger's wife, that is as proud of her money as I of my old blood (God forgive two fools!), which I had no right to do: a maid to walk before a wife. And oh, father, I whispered the gentle-

man who led me out; it was Mr. Neville"— Here the penitent put one hand before her face, and hesitated.

"Well, daughter, half confession is no confession. You said to Mr. Neville?"—

"I said, 'Nothing comes after cheese.'"

This revelation was made most dolefully.

"It was pert and unbecoming," said Father Francis gravely, though a twinkle in his eye showed that he was not so profoundly shocked as his penitent appeared to be. "But go to graver matters. Immodesty, said you: I shall be very sorry, if this is so. You did not use to be immodest."

"Well, father, I hope I have not altogether laid aside modesty, otherwise it would be time for me to die, let alone to confess; but sure it cannot be modest of me to ride after a gentleman, and take him a letter. And then that was not enough: I heard of a duel, and what did I do but ride to Scutchemsee Nob, and interfere. What gentlewoman ever was so bold? I was not their wife, you know, neither of them's."

"Humph!" said the priest; "I have already heard a whisper of this; but told to your credit. *Beati pacifici:* blessed are the peacemakers. You had better lay that matter before me by and by, as your director. As your confessor, tell me why you accuse yourself of luxury."

"Alas!" said the young lady, "scarce a day passes that I do not offend in *that* respect. Example: last Friday, dining abroad, the cooks sent up a dish of collops. O father, they smelt so nice! and I had been a-hunting. First, I smelt them; and that I couldn't help. But then I forgot *custodia oculorum*, and I eyed them; and the next thing was, presently, somehow, two of 'em were on my plate."

"Very wrong," said Father Francis; "but that is a harsher term than I should have applied to this longing

of a hungry woman for collops o' Friday. Pray what do you understand by that big word?"

"Why, you explained it yourself, in your last sermon. It means 'unruly and inordinate desires.' Example: Edith Hammersley told me I was mad to ride in scarlet, and me so fair and my hair so light. 'Green or purple is your color,' says she; and soon after this didn't I see in Stanhope town the loveliest piece of purple broadcloth? O father! it had a gloss like velvet, and the sun did so shine on it, as it lay in the shop-window: it was fit for a king or a bishop; and I stood and gloated on it, and pined for it, and died for it, and down went the Tenth Commandment."

"Ah," said Francis, "the hearts of women are set on vanity. But, tell me, these unruly affections of yours, are they ever fixed on persons of the other sex?"

The fair sinner reflected. "On gentlemen!" said she. "Why, they come pestering one of their own accord. No, no; I could do without *them* very well. What I sinfully pine for is meat on Friday, as sure as ever the day comes round; and high-couraged horses to ride, and fine clothes to wear every day in the week. *Mea culpa! mea culpa!*"

Such being the dismal state of things, Francis slyly requested her to leave the seven deadly sins in peace, and go to her small offences; for he argued shrewdly enough that since her sins were peccadilloes, perhaps some of her peccadilloes might turn out to be sins.

"Small!" cried the culprit, turning red: "they are none of them small." I really think she was jealous of her reputation as a sinner of high degree.

However she complied, and putting up her mouth, murmured a miscellaneous confession without end. The accents were soft and musical, like a babbling brook; and the sins, such as they were, poor things, rippled on in endless rotation.

Now, nothing tends more to repose than a purling brook; and ere long that bassoon, her confessor's nose, let her know she had lost his ear.

She stopped indignant. But at that he instantly awoke (*sublatâ causa, tollitur effectus*), and addressed her thus with sudden dignity: "My daughter, you will fast on Monday next, and say two Aves and a Credo. *Absolvo te.*

"And now," said he, "as I am a practical man, let us get back from the imaginary world into the real. Speak to me at present as your director; and mind you must be serious now, and call things by their right names."

Upon this Kate took a seat, and told her story, and showed him the difficulty she was in. She then reminded him that, notwithstanding her unfortunate hitch for the seven deadly sins, she was a good Catholic, a zealous daughter of the Church; and she let him know her desire to retire from both lovers into a convent; and, so freed from the world and its temptations, yield up her soul entire to celestial peace and divine contemplation.

"Not so fast," said the priest. "Even zeal is nought without obedience. If you could serve the Church better than by going into a convent, would you be wilful?"

"Oh, no, father. But how can I serve the Church better than by renouncing the world?"

"Perhaps by remaining in the world, as she herself does; and by making converts to the faith. You could hardly serve her worse than by going into a convent; for our convents are poor, and you have no means; you would be a charge. No, daughter, we want no poor nuns; we have enough of them. If you are, as I think, a true and zealous daughter of the Church, you must marry; and instil the true faith with all a mother's art, a mother's tenderness, into your children. Then the heir to your husband's estates will be a Catholic, and so the true faith get rooted in the soil."

"Alas!" said Catherine, "are we to look but to the worldly interests of the Church?"

"They are inseparable from her spiritual interests here on earth: our souls are not more bound to our bodies."

Catherine was deeply mortified. "So the Church rejects me because I am poor," said she, with a sigh.

"The Church rejects you not, but only the convent. No place is less fit for you. You have a high spirit, and high religious sentiments; both would be mortified and shocked in a nunnery. Think you that convent walls can shut out temptation? I know them better than you; they are strongholds of vanity, folly, tittle-tattle, and all the meanest vices of your sex. Nay, I forbid you to think of it; show me now your faith by your obedience."

"You are harsh to me, father," said Catherine, piteously.

"I am firm. You are one that need a tight hand, mistress. Come now, humility and obedience, these are the Christian graces that best become your youth. Say, can the Church, through me its minister, count on these from you, or (suddenly letting loose his diapason) did you send for me to ask advice, and yet go your own way, hiding a high stomach and a wilful heart under a show of humility?"

Catherine looked at Father Francis with dismay. This was the first time that easy-going priest had shown her how impressive he could be. She was downright frightened; and said she hoped she knew better than defy her director; she laid her will at his feet; and would obey him like a child, as was her duty.

"Now I know my daughter again," said he, and gave her his horrible paw; the which she kissed very humbly, and that matter was settled to her entire dissatisfaction.

Soon after that they were both summoned to supper; but, as they went down, Kate's maid drew her aside, and told her a young man wanted to speak to her.

"A young man!" screamed Kate. "Hang young men! They have got me a fine scolding just now. Which is it, pray?"

"He is a stranger to me."

"Perhaps he comes with a message from some fool. You may bring him to me in the hall, and stay with us; it may be a thief for aught I know."

The maid soon reappeared, followed by Mr. Thomas Leicester.

That young worthy had lingered on Scutchemsee Nob, to extract the last drop of enjoyment from the situation, by setting up his hat at ten paces, and firing the gentlemen's pistols at it. I despair of conveying to any rational reader the satisfaction, keen though brief, this afforded him: it was a new sensation; gentlemen's guns he had fired many, but duelling pistols not one till that bright hour.

He was now come to remind Catherine of his pecuniary claims. Luckily for him she was one who did not need to be reminded of her promises. "Oh, it is you, child," said she; "well, I'll be as good as my word." She then dismissed her maid, and went up-stairs, and soon returned with two guineas, a crown piece, and three shillings in her hand. "There," said she, smiling, "I am sorry for you, but that is all the money I have in the world."

The boy's eyes glittered at sight of the coin; he rammed the silver into his pocket with hungry rapidity. But he shook his head about the gold. "I'm afeard o' these," said he, and eyed them mistrustfully in his palm. "These be the friends that get you your throat cut o' dark nights; mistress, please keep 'em for me, and let me have a shilling now and then when I'm dry."

"Nay," said Kate, "but are you not afraid I shall spend your money, now I have none left of my own?"

Tom seemed quite struck with the reasonableness of

this observation, and hesitated. However he concluded to risk it. "You don't look one of the sort to wrong a poor fellow," said he; "and besides you'll have brass to spare of your own before long, I know."

Kate opened her eyes. "Oh, indeed!" said she; "and pray how do you know that?"

Mr. Leicester favored her with a knowing wink. He gave her a moment to digest this; and then said, almost in a whisper, "Hearkened the gentlefolks on Scutchemsee Nob, after you was gone home, mistress."

Kate was annoyed. "What! they must be prating as soon as one's back is turned. Talk of women's tongues! Now what did they say, I should like to know?"

"It was about the bet, ye know."

"A bet! Oh, that is no affair of mine."

"Ay, but it is. Why, 'twas you they were betting on; seems that old soger and Squire Hammersley had laid three guineas to one that you should let out which was your fancy of them two."

Kate's cheeks were red as fire now; but her delicacy overpowered her curiosity, and she would not put any more questions. To be sure, young hopeful needed none; he was naturally a chatterbox, and he proceeded to tell her, that as soon as ever she was gone, Squire Hammersley took a guinea, and offered it to the old soldier, and told him he had won; and the old soldier pocketed it. But after that, somehow, Squire Hammersley let drop that Mr. Neville was the favorite. "Then," continued Mr. Leicester, "what does the old soger do, but pull out guinea again, and says he, 'You must have this back, bet is not won; for you do think 'tis Neville, now I do think 'tis Gaunt.' So then they fell to argufying, and talking a lot o' stuff."

"No doubt, the insolent meddlers! Can you remember any of their nonsense? not that it is worth remembering, I'll be bound."

"Let me see: well, Squire Hammersley he said you owned to dreaming of Squire Neville, and that was a sign of love, said he; and, besides, you sided with him against t'other. But the old soger he said you called Squire Gaunt 'Griffith,' and he built on that. Oh, and a said you changed the horses back to please our squire. Says he, 'You must look to what the lady did; never heed what she said. Why, their sweet lips was only made to kiss us, and deceive us,' says that there old soger."

"I'll — I'll — and what did you say, sir? For I suppose your tongue was not idle?"

"Oh, me. I never let 'em know I was hearkening, or they'd have 'greed in a moment for to give me a hiding. Besides, I had no need to cudgel my brains. I'd only to ask you plump. You'll tell *me*, I know. Which is it, mistress? I'm for Gaunt, you know, in course. Alack, mistress," gabbled this voluble youth, "sure you won't be so hard as sack my squire, and him got a bullet in his carcass, for love of you, this day."

Kate started, and looked at him in surprise. "Oh!" said she, "a bullet! Did they fight again the moment they saw my back was turned? The cowards!" and she began to tremble.

"No, no," said Tom; "that was done before ever you came up. Don't ye remember that single shot while we were climbing the Nob? Well, 'twas Squire Gaunt got it in the arm that time."

"Oh!"

"But I say, wasn't our man game? never let out he was hit while you was there. But as soon as ever you was gone they cut the bullet out of him, and I seen it."

"Ah! — ah!"

"Doctor takes out his knife; precious sharp and shiny 'twas; cuts into his arm with no more ado than if he was carving a pullet; out squirts the blood, a good un."

"Oh, no more! no more! You cruel boy; how could you bear to look?" And Kate hid her own face with both hands.

"Why, 'twasn't *my* skin as was cut into. Squire Gaunt he never hollered; a winced though, and ground his teeth; but 'twas over in a minute, and the bullet in his hand. 'That is for my wife,' says he, 'if ever I have one,' and puts it in his pocket. Why, mistress, you be as white as your smock."

"No, no. Did he faint, poor soul?"

"Not he. What was there to faint about?"

"Then why do I feel so sick, even to hear of it?"

"Because you hain't got no stomach," said the boy, contemptuously. "Your courage is skin deep, I'm thinking. However, I'm glad you feel for our squire, about the bullet. So now I hope you will wed with *him*, and sack Squire Neville. Then you and I shall be kind o' kin. Squire Gaunt's feyther was my feyther. That makes you stare, mistress. Why, all the folk do know it. Look at this here little mole on my forehead. Squire Gaunt have got the fellow to that." At this crisis of his argument, he suddenly caught a glimpse of his personal interest; instantly he ceased his advocacy of Squire Gaunt, and became ludicrously impartial. "Well, mistress, wed whichever you like," said he, with sublime indifference; "only, whichever you *do* wed, prithee speak a word to the gentleman, and get me to be his gamekeeper. I'd liever be your goodman's gamekeeper than King of England." He was proceeding with vast volubility to enumerate his qualifications for that confidential post, when the lady cut him short, and told him to go and get his supper in the kitchen, for she was wanted elsewhere. He made a scrape, and clattered away with his hobnailed shoes.

Kate went to the hall window and opened it, and let the cold air blow over her face.

Her heart was touched, and her bosom filled with pity for her old sweetheart.

How hard she had been. She had sided with Neville against the wounded man. And she thought how sadly and patiently he had submitted to her decision — and a bullet in his poor arm all the time.

The gentle bosom heaved and heaved, and the tears began to run.

She entered the dining-room timidly, expecting some comment on her discourteous absence. Instead of that, both her father and her director rose respectfully, and received her with kind and affectionate looks. They then pressed her to eat this and that, and were remarkably attentive and kind. She could see she was deep in their good books. This pleased her, but she watched quietly, after the manner of her sex, to learn what it was all about. Nor was she left long in the dark. Remarks were made that hit her, though they were none of them addressed to her.

Father Francis delivered quite a little homily on "obedience," and said how happy a thing it was when zeal, a virtue none too common in these degenerate days, was found tempered by humility, and subservient to ghostly counsel and authority.

Mr. Peyton dwelt on no general topics of that kind. His discourse was secular; it ran upon Neville's Cross, Neville's Court, and the Baronetcy; and he showed Francis how and why this title must, sooner or later, come to George Neville, and the heirs of his body.

Francis joined in this topic for a while, but speedily diverged into what might be called a collateral theme. He described to Kate a delightful spot on the Neville estate, where a nunnery might be built and endowed by any good Catholic lady having zeal, and influence with the owner of the estate and with the lord-lieutenant of the county.

"It is three parts an island (for the river Wey curls round it lovingly); but backed by wooded slopes that keep off the north and east winds; a hidden and balmy place; such as the forefathers of the Church did use to choose for their rustic abbeys, whose ruins still survive to remind us of the pious and glorious days gone by. Trout and salmon come swimming to the door; hawthorn and woodbine are as rife there as weeds be in some parts; two broad oaks stand on turf like velvet, and ring with song-birds. A spot by nature sweet, calm, and holy; good for pious exercises and heavenly contemplation. There, methinks, if it be God's will I should see old age, I would love to end my own days, at peace with Heaven and with all mankind."

Kate was much moved by this picture, and her clasped hands and glistening eyes showed the glory and delight it would be to her to build a convent on so lovely a spot. But her words were vague. "How sweet! how sweet!" was all she committed herself to. For, after what Tom Leicester had just told her, she hardly knew what to say, or what to think, or what to do. She felt she had become a mere puppet, first drawn one way, then another.

One thing appeared pretty clear to her now. Father Francis did not mean her to choose between her two lovers; he was good enough to relieve her of that difficulty by choosing for her. She was to marry Neville.

She retired to rest directly after supper, for she was thoroughly worn out. And the moment she rose to go, her father bounced up and lighted the bed-candle for her with novel fervor, and kissed her on the cheek, and said in her ear, "Good-night, my Lady Neville."

CHAPTER VIII.

What with the day's excitement, and a sweet secluded convent in her soul, and a bullet in her bosom, and a ringing in her ear that sounded mighty like "Lady Neville! Lady Neville! Lady Neville!" Kate spent a restless night, and woke with a bad headache.

She sent her maid to excuse her, on this score, from going to Bolton Hall. But she was informed in reply that the carriage had been got ready expressly for her; so she must be good enough to shake off disease and go; the air would do her a deal more good than lying abed.

Thereupon she dressed herself in her black silk gown, and came down looking pale and languid, but still quite lovely enough to discharge what in this age of cant I suppose we should call "her mission;" *videlicet*, to set honest men by the ears.

At half-past eight o'clock the carriage came round to the front door. Its body, all glorious with the Peyton armorials, and with patches of rusty gilding, swung exceedingly loose on long leathern straps instead of springs, and the fore-wheels were a mile from the hind-wheels, more or less. A pretentious and horrible engine, drawn by four horses; only two of them being ponies impaired the symmetry and majestic beauty of the pageant. Old Joe drove the wheelers; his boy rode the leaders, and every now and then got off and kicked them in the pits of their stomachs, or pierced them with hedge-stakes, to rouse their mettle. Thus encouraged and stimulated, they effected an average of four miles and a half per hour, notwithstanding the snow, and

reached Bolton just in time. At the lodge, Francis got out, and lay in ambush. But only for a time. He did not think it orthodox to be present at a religious ceremony of his Protestant friends, nor common-sense-o-dox to turn his back upon their dinner.

The carriage drew up at the hall door. It was wide open, and the hall lined with servants, male and female, in black. In the midst, between these two rows, stood Griffith Gaunt, bareheaded, to welcome the guests. His arm was in a sling. He had received all the others in the middle of the hall; but he came to the threshold to meet Kate and her father. He bowed low and respectfully, then gave his left hand to Kate to conduct her after the formal fashion of the day. The sight of his arm in a sling startled and affected her; and with him giving her his hand almost at the same moment, she pressed it, or indeed squeezed it nervously, and it was in her heart to say something kind and womanly; but her father was close behind, and she was afraid of saying something too kind, if she said anything at all; so Griffith only got a little gentle nervous pinch. But that was more than he expected, and sent a thrill of delight through him: his brown eyes replied with a volume, and holding her hand up in the air, as high as her ear, and keeping at an incredible distance, he led her solemnly to a room where the other ladies were, and left her there with a profound bow.

The Peytons were nearly the last persons expected; and soon after their arrival the funeral procession formed. This part was entirely arranged by the undertaker. The monstrous custom of forbidding ladies to follow their dead had not yet occurred even to the idiots of the nation; and Mr. Peyton and his daughter were placed in the second carriage. The first contained Griffith Gaunt alone, as head mourner. But the Peytons were not

alone; no other relation of the deceased being present, the undertaker put Mr. Neville with the Peytons, because he was heir to a baronetcy.

Kate was much startled, and astonished to see him come out into the hall. But, when he entered the carriage, she welcomed him warmly. "Oh, I am so glad to see you here," said she.

"Guess by that what my delight at meeting you must be," said he.

She blushed and turned it off. "I mean, that your coming here gives me good hopes there will be no more mischief." She then lowered her voice, and begged him on no account to tell her father of her ride to Scutchemsee Nob.

"Not a word," said George. He knew the advantage of sharing a secret with a fair lady. He proceeded to whisper something very warm in her ear: she listened to some of it, but then remonstrated and said, "Are you not ashamed to go on so at a funeral? Oh, do pray leave compliments a moment, and think of your latter end."

He took this suggestion, as indeed he did everything from her, in good part, and composed his visage into a decent gravity.

Soon after this they reached the church, and buried the deceased in his family vault.

People who are not bereaved by the death are always inclined to chatter coming home from a funeral. Kate now talked to Neville of her own accord, and asked him if he had spoken to his host. He said, "Yes;" and, more than that, had come to a clear understanding with him. "We agreed that it was no use fighting for you. I said if either of us two was to kill the other, it does not follow you would wed the survivor."

"Me wed the wretch!" said Kate. "I should abhor

him, and go into a convent in spite of you all, and end my days praying for the murdered man's soul."

"Neither of us is worth all that," suggested Neville, with an accent of conviction.

"That is certain," repled the lady dryly, "so please not to do it."

He bade her set her mind at ease: they had both agreed to try and win her by peaceful arts.

"Then a pretty life mine will be."

"Well, I think it will, till you decide."

"I could easily decide, if it were not for giving pain to — somebody."

"Oh, you can't help that. My sweet mistress, you are not the first that has had to choose between two worthy men. For, in sooth, I have nothing to say against my rival neither. I know him better than I did: he is a very worthy gentleman, though he is damnably in my way."

"And you are a very noble one to say so."

"And you are one of those that make a man noble: I feel that petty arts are not the way to win you, and I scorn them. Sweet Mistress Kate, I adore you. You are the best and noblest, as well as the loveliest of women."

"Oh, hush! Mr. Neville, I am a creature of clay, and you are another, and both of us coming home from a funeral. Do think of *that*."

Here they were interrupted by Mr. Peyton asking Kate to lend him a shilling for the groom. Kate replied aloud that she had left her purse at home, then whispered in his ear that she had not a shilling in the world; and this was strictly true, for her little all was Tom Leicester's now. With this they reached the Hall, and the coy Kate gave both Neville and Gaunt the slip, and got amongst her mates. There her tongue went as fast as

her neighbors', though she had just come back from a funeral.

But soon the ladies and gentlemen were all invited to the reading of the will.

And now chance, which had hitherto befriended Neville by throwing him into one carriage with Kate, gave Gaunt a turn. He found her a moment alone and near the embrasure of a window. He seized the opportunity and asked her might he say a word in her ear. "What a question!" said she gayly; and the next moment they had the embrasure to themselves.

"Kate," said he hurriedly, "in a few minutes, I suppose, I shall be master of this place. Now you told me once you would rather be an abbess or a nun than marry me."

"Did I?" said Kate. "What a sensible speech! But the worst of it is I'm never in the same mind long."

"Well," replied Griffith, "I think of all that falls from your lips: and your will is mine; only for pity's sake do not wed any man but me. You have known me so long; why, you know the worst of me by this time; and you have only seen the outside of *him*."

"Detraction! is that what you wanted to say to me?" asked Kate, freezing suddenly.

"Nay, nay; it was about the abbey. I find you can be an abbess without going and shutting yourself up and breaking one's heart. The way is, you build a convent in Ireland, and endow it; and then you send a nun over to govern it under you. Bless your heart! you can do anything with money; and I shall have money enough before the day is over. To be sure, I *did* intend to build a kennel and keep harriers; and you know that costs a good penny; but we couldn't manage a kennel and an abbey too; so now down goes the English kennel and up goes the Irish abbey."

"But you are a Protestant gentleman. You could not found a nunnery."

"But my wife could. Whose business is it what she does with her money?"

"With your money, you mean."

"Nay, with hers, when I give it her with all my heart."

"Well, you astonish me," said Kate thoughtfully. "Tell me, now, who put it into your head to bribe a poor girl in this abominable way?"

"Who put it into my head?" said Griffith, looking rather puzzled; "why, I suppose my heart put it into my head."

Kate smiled very sweetly at this answer, and a wild hope thrilled through Griffith that perhaps she might be brought to terms.

But at this crisis the lawyer from London was announced, and Griffith, as master of the house, was obliged to seat the company. He looked bitterly disappointed at the interruption, but put a good face on it, and had more chairs in, and saw them all seated, beginning with Kate and the other ladies.

The room was spacious, and the entire company sat in the form of a horse-shoe.

The London solicitor was introduced by Griffith and bowed in a short, business-like way; seated himself in the horse-shoe aforesaid, and began to read the will aloud.

It was a lengthy document, and there is nothing to be gained by repeating every line of it. I pick out a clause here and there.

"I Septimus Charlton, of Hernshaw Castle and Bolton Grange, in the county of Cumberland, Esquire, being of sound mind, memory, and understanding — thanks be to God — do make this my last will and testament as follows: First I commit my soul to God who gave it, and my body to the earth from

which it came. I desire my executors to discharge my funeral and testamentary expenses, my just debts, and the legacies hereinafter bequeathed, out of my personal estate."

Then followed several legacies of fifty and one hundred guineas. Then several small legacies; such as the following: —

"To my friend Edward Peyton, of Peyton Hall, Esq., ten guineas, to buy a mourning ring.

"To the worshipful gentlemen and ladies who shall follow my body to the grave, ten guineas each, to buy a mourning ring.

"To my wife's cousin, Griffith Gaunt, I give and bequeath the sum of two thousand pounds, the same to be paid to him within one calendar month from the date of my decease.

"And as to all my messuages, or tenements, farms, lands, hereditaments, and real estate, of what nature or what kind soever and wheresoever situate, together with all my moneys, mortgages, chattels, furniture, plate, pictures, wine, liquors, horses, carriages, stock, and all the rest, residue, and remainder of my personal estate and effects whatsoever (after the payment of the debts and legacies hereinbefore mentioned), I give, devise, and bequeath the same to my cousin, Catherine Peyton, daughter of Edward Peyton, Esq., of Peyton Hall, in the county of Cumberland, her heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns forever."

When the lawyer read out this unexpected blow, the whole company turned in their seats and looked amazed at her, who, in a second and a sentence, was turned before their eyes from the poorest girl in Cumberland to an heiress in her own right, and proprietor of the house they sat in, the chairs they sat on, and the lawn they looked out at.

Ay, we turn to the rising sun: very few looked at Griffith Gaunt to see how he took his mistress's good fortune, that was his calamity: yet his face was a book

full of strange matter. At first a flash of loving joy crossed his countenance; but this gave way immediately to a haggard look, and that to a glare of despair.

As for the lady, she cast one deprecating glance, swifter than lightning, at him she had disinherited; and then she turned her face to marble. In vain did curious looks explore her to detect the delight such a stroke of fortune would have given to themselves. Faulty, but great of soul, and on her guard against the piercing eyes of her own sex, she sat sedate, and received her change of fortune with every appearance of cool composure and exalted indifference: and, as for her dreamy eyes, they seemed thinking of heaven or something almost as many miles away from money and land.

But the lawyer had not stopped a moment to see how people took it, he had gone steadily on through the usual formal clauses: and now he brought his monotonous voice to an end, and added in the same breath, but in a natural and cheerful tone, "Madam, I wish you joy."

This operated like a signal: the company exploded in a body; and then they all came about the heiress, and congratulated her in turn. She courtesied politely though somewhat coldly, but said not a word in reply, till the disappointed one spoke to her.

He hung back at first: to understand his feelings it must be remembered that in this view of things Kate gained nothing by this bequest compared with what he lost. As his wife, she would have been mistress of Bolton Hall, etc. But now she was placed too far above him. Sick at heart, he stood aloof while they all paid their court to her. But, by-and-by, he felt it would look base and hostile if he alone said nothing; so he came forward, struggling visibly for composure and manly fortitude.

The situation was piquant, and the ladies' tongues stopped in a moment, and they were all eyes and ears.

CHAPTER IX.

GRIFFITH, with an effort he had not the skill to hide, stammered out, "Mistress Kate, I do wish you joy." Then with sudden and touching earnestness, "Never did good fortune light on one so worthy of it."

"Thank you, Griffith," replied Kate, softly. (She had called him 'Mr. Gaunt' in public till now.) "But money and lands do not always bring content. I think I was happier a minute ago than I feel now," said she, quietly.

The blood rushed into Griffith's face at this; for a minute ago might mean when he and she were talking almost like lovers about to wed. He was so overcome by this, he turned on his heel, and retreated hastily to hide his emotion, and regain, if possible, composure to play his part of host in the house that was his no longer.

Kate herself soon after retired, nominally to make her toilet before dinner; but really to escape the public, and think it all over.

The news of her advancement had spread like wildfire: she was waylaid at the very door by the housekeeper, who insisted on showing her her house. "Nay, never mind the house," said Kate: "just show me one room where I can wash my face and do my hair."

Mrs. Hill conducted her to the best bedroom: it was lined with tapestry, and all the colors flown; the curtains were a deadish yellow.

"Lud! here's a colored room to show *me* into," said the blonde Kate: "and a black grate, too. Why not take me out o' doors and bid me wash in the snow?"

"Alack, mistress," said the woman, feeling very un-

easy, "we had no orders from Mr. Gaunt to light fires *up* stairs."

"Oh, if you wait for gentlemen's orders to make your house fit to live in! You knew there were a dozen ladies coming, yet you were not woman enough to light them fires. Come, take me to your own bedroom."

The woman turned red: "Mine is but a small room, my lady," she stammered.

"But there's a fire in it," said Kate, spitefully. "You servants don't wait for gentlemen's orders, to take care of yourselves."

Mrs. Hill said to herself, "I'm to leave; that is flat." However, she led the way down a passage, and opened the door of a pleasant little room in a square turret: a large bay window occupied one whole side of the room, and made it inexpressibly bright and cheerful, though rather hot and stuffy: a clear coal fire burned in the grate.

"Ah!" said Kate, "how nice! Please open those little windows every one. I suppose you have sworn never to let wholesome air into a room. Thank you; now go and forget every cross word I have said to you — I am out of sorts, and nervous, and irritable. There, run away, my good soul, and light fires in every room; and don't you let a creature come near me, or you and I shall quarrel downright."

Mrs. Hill beat a hasty retreat. Kate locked the door and threw herself backwards on the bed, with such a weary recklessness and abandon, as if she were throwing herself into the sea, to end all her trouble — and burst out crying.

It was one thing to refuse to marry her old sweetheart; it was another to take his property and reduce him to poverty. But here was she doing both, and going to be persuaded to marry Neville, and swell his wealth with the very possessions she had taken from Griffith;

and him wounded into the bargain for love of her. It was really too cruel. It was an accumulation of different cruelties. Her bosom revolted: she was agitated, perplexed, irritated, unhappy, and all in a tumult: and, although she had but one fit of crying, — to the naked eye, — yet a person of her own sex would have seen that at one moment she was crying from agitated nerves, at another from worry, and at the next from pity, and then from grief.

In short, she had a good long, hearty, multiform cry; and it relieved her swelling heart so far, that she felt able to go down now, and hide her feelings, one and all, from friend and foe; to do which was, unfortunately, a part of her nature.

She rose and plunged her face into cold water, and then smoothed her hair.

Now, as she stood at the glass, two familiar voices came in through the open window, and arrested her attention directly. It was her father conversing with Griffith Gaunt. Kate pricked up her quick ears and listened, with her back hair in her hand. She caught the subject of their talk, only now and then she missed a word or two.

Mr. Peyton was speaking rather kindly to Griffith, and telling him he was as sorry for his disappointment as any father could be whose daughter had just come into a fortune. But then he went on and rather spoiled this by asking Griffith bluntly what on earth had ever made him think Mr. Charlton intended to leave him Bolton and Hernshaw.

Griffith replied, with manifest agitation, that Mr. Charlton had repeatedly told him he was to be his heir. "Not," said Griffith, "that he meant to wrong Mistress Kate, neither: poor old man, he always thought she and I should be one."

"Ah! well," said Squire Peyton coolly, "there is an end of all that now."

At this observation Kate glided to the window, and laid her cheek on the sill to listen more closely.

But Griffith made no reply.

Mr. Peyton seemed dissatisfied at his silence, and being a person who, notwithstanding a certain superficial good-nature, saw his own side of a question very big, and his neighbor's very little, he was harder than perhaps he intended to be.

"Why, Master Gaunt," said he, "surely you would not follow my daughter now; to feed upon a woman's bread. Come, be a man; and, if you are the girl's friend, don't stand in her light. You know she can wed your betters, and clap Bolton Hall on to Neville's Court. No doubt it is a disappointment to *you:* but what can't be cured must be endured; pluck up a bit of courage, and turn your heart another way; and then I shall always be a good friend to you, and my doors open to you, come when you will."

Griffith made no reply. Kate strained her ears, but could not hear a syllable. A tremor ran through her. She was in distance farther from Griffith than her father was; but superior intelligence provided her with a bridge from her window to her old servant's mind. And now she felt that this great silence was the silence of despair.

But the squire pressed him for a definite answer; and finally insisted on one. "Come, don't be sulky," said he; "I'm her father: give me an answer, ay or no."

Then Kate heard a violent sigh, and out rushed a torrent of words that each seemed tinged with blood from the unfortunate speaker's heart. "Old man," he almost shrieked, "what did I ever do to you that you torment me so? Sure you were born without bowels. Beggared but an hour agone, and now you must come

and tell me I have lost *her* by losing house and lands! D'ye think I need to be *told* of it? She was too far above me before, and now she is gone quite out of my reach. But why come and fling it in my face? Can't you give a poor undone man one hour to draw his breath in trouble? And, when you know I have got to play the host this bitter day, and smile, and smirk, and make you all merry, with my heart breaking. O Christ, look down and pity me, for men are made of stone! Well, then, no; I will not, I cannot, say the word, to give her up. *She* will discharge *me*, and then I'll fly the country, and never trouble you more. And to think that one little hour ago she was so kind, and I was so happy: ah, sir, if you were born of a woman, have a little pity, and don't speak to me of her at all one way or other. What are you afraid of? I am a gentleman and a man, though sore my trouble: I shall not run after the lady of Bolton Hall. Why, sir, I have ordered the servants to set her chair in the middle of the table, where I shall not be able to speak to her, or even see her. Indeed, I dare not look at her: for I must be merry. Merry! My arm it worries me, my head it aches, my heart is sick to death. Man! man! show me some little grace, and do not torture me more than flesh and blood can bear."

"You are mad, young sir," said the squire sternly, "and want locking up on bread and water for a month."

"I *am* almost mad," said Griffith humbly. "But if you would only let me alone, and not tear my heart out of my body, I could hide my agony from the whole pack of ye, and go through my part like a man. I wish I was lying where I laid my only friend this afternoon."

"Oh! I don't want to speak to you," said Peyton, angrily; "and, by the same token, don't you speak to my daughter any more."

"Well, sir, if she speaks to me I shall be sure to speak to her, without asking your leave or any man's. But I will not force myself upon the lady of Bolton Hall; don't you think it. Only for God's sake let me alone. I want to be by myself." And, with this, he hurried away, unable to bear it any more.

Peyton gave a hostile and contemptuous snort, and also turned on his heel, and went off in the opposite direction. The effect of this dialogue on the listener was not to melt, but exasperate her. Perhaps she had just cried away her stock of tenderness. At any rate, she rose from her ambush a very basilisk; her eyes, usually so languid, flashed fire, and her forehead was red with indignation. She bit her lip, and clenched her hands, and her little foot beat the ground swiftly.

She was still in this state when a timid tap came to the door, and Mrs. Hill asked her pardon, but dinner was ready, and the ladies and gentlemen all a-waiting for her to sit down.

This reminded Kate she was the mistress of the house. She answered civilly she would be down immediately. She then took a last look in the glass; and her own face startled her.

"No," she thought; "they shall none of them know nor guess what I feel." And she stood before the glass and deliberately extracted all emotion from her countenance, and by way of preparation screwed on a spiteful smile.

When she had got her face to her mind, she went down-stairs.

The gentlemen awaited her with impatience, the ladies with curiosity, to see how she would comport herself in her new situation. She entered, made a formal courtesy, and was conducted to her seat by Mr. Gaunt. He placed her in the middle of the table. "I play the host for

this one day," said he, with some dignity; and took the bottom of the table himself.

Mr. Hammersley was to have sat on Kate's left, but the sly Neville persuaded him to change, and so got next to his inamorata: opposite to her sat her father, Major Rickards, and others unknown to fame.

Neville was in high spirits. He had the good taste to try and hide his satisfaction at the fatal blow his rival had received, and he entirely avoided the topic; but Kate saw at once, by his demure complacency, he was delighted at the turn things had taken; and he gained nothing by it: he found her a changed girl. Cold monosyllables were all he could extract from her. He returned to the charge a hundred times with indomitable gallantry, but it was no use. Cold, haughty, sullen!

Her other neighbor fared little better; and in short the lady of the house made a vile impression. She was an iceberg: a beautiful kill-joy: a wet blanket of charming texture.

And presently nature began to co-operate with her: long before sunset it grew prodigiously dark; and the cause was soon revealed by a fall of snow in flakes as large as a biscuit. A shiver ran through the people; and old Peyton blurted out, "I shall not go home to-night." Then he bawled across the table to his daughter: "*You* are at home. We will stay and take possession."

"Oh, papa!" said Kate, reddening with disgust.

But if dulness reigned around the lady of the house, it was not so everywhere: loud bursts of merriment were heard at the bottom of the table. Kate glanced that way in some surprise, and found it was Griffith making the company merry; Griffith, of all people.

The laughter broke out at short intervals, and by-and-by became uproarious and constant. At last she looked at Neville inquiringly.

"Our worthy host is setting us an example of conviviality," said he. "He is getting drunk."

"Oh, I hope not," said Kate. "Has he no friend to tell him not to make a fool of himself?"

"You take a great interest in him," said Neville, bitterly.

"Of course I do. Pray do you desert your friends when ill luck falls on them?"

"Nay, Mistress Kate, I hope not."

"You only triumph over the misfortunes of your enemies, eh?" said the stinging beauty.

"Not even that. And, as for Mr. Gaunt, I am not his enemy."

"Oh, no, of course not. You are his best friend. Witness his arm at this moment."

"I am his rival; but not his enemy: I'll give you a proof." Then he lowered his voice, and said in her ear: "You are grieved at his losing Bolton; and, as you are very generous and noble-minded, you are all the more grieved because his loss is your gain." (Kate blushed at this shrewd hit.) Neville went on: "You don't like him well enough to marry him; and, since you cannot make him happy, it hurts your good heart to make him poor."

"It is you for reading a lady's heart," said Kate, ironically.

George proceeded steadily. "I'll show you an easy way out of this dilemma."

"Thank you," said Kate, rather insolently.

"Give Mr. Gaunt Bolton and Hernshaw, and give me —your hand."

Kate turned and looked at him with surprise: she saw by his eye it was no jest. For all that, she affected to take it as one. "That would be long and short division," said she: but her voice faltered in saying it.

"So it would," replied George, coolly; "for Bolton

and Hernshaw both are not worth one finger of that hand I ask of you. But the value of things lies in the mind that weighs 'em. Mr. Gaunt, you see, values Bolton and Hernshaw very highly; why, he is in despair at losing them. Look at him; he is getting rid of his reason before your very eyes, to drown his disappointment."

"Oh, that is it, is it?" And, strange to say, she looked rather relieved.

"That is it, believe me: it is a way we men have. But, as I was saying, *I* don't care one straw for Bolton and Hernshaw. It is *you* I love; not your land nor your house, but your sweet self: so give me that, and let the lawyers make over this famous house and lands to Mr. Gaunt. His antagonist I have been in the field, and his rival I am and must be, but not his enemy, you see, and not his ill-wisher."

Kate was softened a little. "This is all mighty romantic," said she, "and very like a preux chevalier, as you are; but you know very well he would fling land and house in your face if you offered them him on these terms."

"Ay, in my face if I offered them; but not in yours if you."

"I am sure he would, all the same."

"Try him."

"What is the use?"

"Try him."

Kate showed symptoms of uneasiness. "Well, I will," said she stoutly. "No, that I will not. You begin by bribing me; and then you would set me to bribe him."

"It is the only way to make two honest men happy."

"If I thought that" —

"You know it. Try him."

"And suppose he says nay?"

"Then we shall be no worse than we are."

"And suppose he says ay?"

"Then he will wed Bolton Hall and Hernshaw; and the pearl of England will wed me."

"I have a great mind to take you at your word," said Kate; "but no; it is really too indelicate."

George Neville fixed his eyes on her. "Are you not deceiving yourself?" said he. "Do you not like Mr. Gaunt better than you think? I begin to fear you dare not put him to this test: you fear his love would not stand it."

Kate colored high, and tossed her head proudly.

"How shrewd you gentlemen are," she said. "Much you know of a lady's heart. Now the truth is, I don't know what might happen were I to do as you bid me. Nay, I'm wiser than you would have me, and I'll pity Mr. Gaunt at a safe distance, if you please, sir."

Neville bowed gravely: he felt sure this was a plausible evasion; and that she really was afraid to apply his test to his rival's love.

So now for the first time he became silent and reserved by her side. The change was noticed by Father Francis, and he fixed a grave remonstrating glance on Kate. She received it, understood it, affected not to notice it, and acted upon it.

Drive a donkey too hard; it kicks.

Drive a man too hard; it hits.

Drive a woman too hard; it cajoles.

Now amongst them they had driven Kate Peyton too hard; so she secretly formed a bold resolution; and, this done, her whole manner changed for the better. She turned to Neville, and flattered and fascinated him. The most feline of her sex could scarcely equal her *calinerie* on this occasion. But she did not confine her fascination to him. She broke out, *pro bono publico*, like the sun in

April, with quips and cranks and dimpled smiles, and made everybody near her quite forget her late hauteur and coldness, and bask in this sunny sweet hostess, When the charm was at its height, the siren cast a seeming merry glance at Griffith, and said to a lady opposite, "Methinks some of the gentlemen will be glad to be rid of us," and so carried the ladies off to the drawing-room.

There, her first act was to dismiss her smiles without ceremony, and her second was to sit down and write four lines to the gentleman at the head of the dining-table.

And he was as drunk as a fiddler.

CHAPTER X.

Griffith's friends laughed heartily with him while he was getting drunk, and, when he had got drunk, they laughed still louder, only at him.

They "knocked him down" for a song; and he sang a rather Anacreontic one very melodiously, and so loud that certain of the servants, listening outside, derived great delectation from it; and Neville applauded ironically.

Soon after, they "knocked him down" for a story; and, as it requires more brains to tell a story than to sing a song, the poor butt made an ass of himself: he maundered and wandered, and stopped, and went on, and lost one thread and took up another, and got into a perfect maze. And, while he was thus entangled, a servant came in and brought him a note, and put it in his hand. The unhappy narrator received it with a sapient nod, but was too polite or else too stupid to open it; so closed his fingers on it and went maundering on till his story trickled into the sand of the desert, and somehow ceased; for it could not be said to end, being a thing without head or tail.

He sat down amidst derisive cheers. About five minutes afterwards, in some intermittent flash of reason, he found he had got hold of something. He opened his hand, and lo, a note! On this he chuckled unreasonably, and distributed sage, cunning winks around, as if he by special ingenuity had caught a nightingale, or the like; then with sudden hauteur and gravity proceeded to examine his prize.

But he knew the handwriting at once, and it gave him

a galvanic shock that half sobered him for the moment.

He opened the note and spelled it with great difficulty; it was beautifully written in long, clear letters; but then those letters kept dancing so.

I much desire to speak to you before 'tis too late; but can think of no way save one; I lie in the turreted room: come under my window at nine of the clock; and prithee come sober if you respect yourself, or KATE.

Griffith put the note in his pocket, and tried to think. But he could not think to much purpose. Then this made him suspect he was drunk. Then he tried to be sober, but he found he could not. He sat in a sort of stupid agony, with love and drink battling for his brain. It was piteous to see the poor fool's struggles to regain the reason he had so madly parted with. He could not do it; and, when he found that, he took up a finger-glass and gravely poured the contents upon his head.

At this there was a burst of laughter.

This irritated Mr. Gaunt, and, with that rapid change of sentiments which marks the sober savage and the drunker European, he offered to fight a gentleman he had been hitherto holding up to the company as his best friend. But his best friend (a very distant acquaintance) was by this time as tipsy as himself, and offered a piteous disclaimer, mingled with tears; and these maudlin drops so affected Griffith that he flung his one available arm round his best friend's head, and wept in turn; and down went both their lachrymose, empty noddles on the table. Griffith's remained there; but his best friend extricated himself, and shaking his skull, said, dolefully, "He is very drunk." This notable discovery, coming from such a quarter, caused considerable merriment.

"Let him alone," said an old toper; and Griffith re-

mained a good hour with his head on the table. Meantime the other gentlemen soon put it out of their power to ridicule him on the score of intoxication.

Griffith, keeping quiet, got a little better, and suddenly started up with a notion he was to go to Kate this very moment. He muttered an excuse, and staggered to a glass door that led to the lawn; he opened this door, and rushed out into the open air. He thought it would set him all right: but, instead of that, it made him so much worse that presently his legs came to a misunderstanding, and he measured his length on the ground, and could not get up again, but kept slipping down.

Upon this he groaned and lay quiet.

Now there was a foot of snow on the ground, and it melted about Griffith's hot temples and flushed face, and mightily refreshed and revived him.

He sat up and kissed Kate's letter, and love began to get the upper hand of liquor a little.

Finally he got up, and half strutted, half staggered, to the turret, and stood under Kate's window.

The turret was covered with luxuriant ivy, and that ivy with snow. So the glass of the window was set in a massive frame of winter; but a bright fire burned inside the room, and this set the panes all aflame. It was cheery and glorious to see the window glow like a sheet of transparent fire in its deep frame of snow; but Griffith could not appreciate all that. He stood there a sorrowful man. The wine he had taken to drown his despair had lost its stimulating effect, and had given him a heavy head, but left him his sick heart.

He stood and puzzled his drowsy faculties why Kate had sent for him. Was it to bid him good-by forever, or to lessen his misery by telling him she would not marry another? He soon gave up cudgelling his enfeebled brains; Kate was a superior being to him, and often

said things and did things that surprised him. She had sent for him, and that was enough; he should see her, and speak to her once more, at all events. He stood, alternately nodding and looking up at her glowing room, and longing for its owner to appear. But, as Bacchus had inspired him to mistake eight o'clock for nine, and as she was not a votary of Bacchus, she did not appear; and he stood there till he began to shiver.

The shadow of a female passed along the wall, and Griffith gave a great start. Then he heard the fire poked. Soon after he saw the shadow again; but it had a large servant's cap on; so his heart had beaten high for Mary or Susan. He hung his head disappointed; and, holding on by the ivy, fell a-nodding again.

By-and-by one of the little casements was opened softly. He looked up, and there was the right face peering out.

Oh, what a picture she was in the moonlight and the firelight! They both fought for that fair head, and each got a share of it: the full moon's silvery beams shone on her rose-like cheeks and lilyfied them a shade, and lit her great gray eyes and made them gleam astoundingly; but the ruby firelight rushed at her from behind, and flowed over her golden hair, and reddened and glorified it till it seemed more than mortal. And all this in a very picture-frame of snow.

Imagine, then, how sweet and glorious she glowed on him who loved her, and who looked at her perhaps for the last time.

The sight did wonders to clear his head; he stood open-mouthed, with his heart beating. She looked him all over a moment. "Ah!" said she. Then, quietly, "I am so glad you are come." Then, kindly and regretfully, "How pale you look! you are unhappy."

This greeting, so gentle and kind, overpowered Griffith. His heart was too full to speak.

Kate waited a moment; and then, as he did not reply to her, she began to plead to him. "I hope you are not angry with *me*," she said. "*I* did not want him to leave me your estates. I would not rob you of them for the world, if I had my way."

"Angry with you!" said Griffith. "I'm not such a villain. Mr. Charlton did the right thing, and"— He could say no more.

"I do not think so," said Kate. "But don't you fret; all shall be settled to your satisfaction. I cannot quite love you, but I have a sincere affection for you; and so I ought. Cheer up, dear Griffith; don't you be downhearted about what has happened to-day."

Griffith smiled. "I don't feel unhappy," he said; "I did feel as if my heart was broken. But then you seemed parted from me. Now we are together I feel as happy as ever. Mistress, don't you ever shut that window and leave me in the dark again. Let me stand and look at your sweet face all night, and I shall be the happiest man in Cumberland."

"Ay," said Kate, blushing at his ardor; "happy for a single night; but when I go away you will be in the dumps again, and perhaps get tipsy; as if that could mend matters. Nay, I must set your happiness on stronger legs than that. Do you know I have got permission to undo this cruel will, and let you have Bolton Hall and Hernshaw again?"

Griffith looked pleased, but rather puzzled.

Kate went on, but not so glibly now. "However," said she, a little nervously, "there is one condition to it that will cost us both some pain. If you consent to accept these two estates from me, who don't value them one straw, why then"—

She hesitated.

"Well, what?" he gasped.

"Why, then, my poor Griffith, we shall be bound in honor, — you and I, — not to meet for some months: perhaps for a whole year: in one word — do not hate me — not till you can bear to see me — another — man's — wife."

The murder being out, she hid her face in her hands directly, and in that attitude awaited his reply.

Griffith stood petrified a moment; and I don't think his intellects were even yet quite clear enough to take it all in at once. But at last he did comprehend it, and, when he did, he just uttered a loud cry of agony, and then turned his back on her without a word.

Man does not speak by words alone. A mute glance of reproach has ere now pierced the heart a tirade would have left untouched; and even an inarticulate cry may utter volumes.

Such an eloquent cry was that with which Griffith Gaunt turned his back upon the angelical face he adored, and the soft persuasive tongue. There was agony, there was shame, there was wrath, all in that one ejaculation.

It frightened Kate. She called him back. "Don't leave me so," she said. "I know I have affronted you; but I meant all for the best. Do not let us part in anger."

At this Griffith returned in violent agitation. "It is your fault for making me speak," he cried. "I was going away without a word, as a man should, that is insulted by a woman. You heartless girl! What! you bid me sell you to that man for two dirty farms! Oh, well you know Bolton and Hernshaw were but the steps by which I hoped to climb to you; and now you tell me to part with you, and take those miserable acres instead of my darling. Ah! mistress, you have never loved: or

you would hate yourself and despise yourself for what you have done. Love! if you had known what that word means, you couldn't look in my face and stab me to the heart like this. God forgive you! And sure I hope He will; for after all, it is not *your* fault that you were born without a heart. WHY, KATE, YOU ARE CRYING."

CHAPTER XI.

"Crying!" said Kate. "I could cry my eyes out to think what I have done; but it is not my fault; they egged me on. I knew you would fling those two miserable things in my face if I did, and I said so; but they would be wiser than me, and insist on my putting you to the proof."

"They? Who is they?"

"No matter. Whoever it was, they will gain nothing by it, and you will lose nothing. Ah, Griffith, I am so ashamed of myself — and so proud of you."

"They?" repeated Griffith, suspiciously. "Who is this they?"

"What does that matter, so long as it was not me? Are you going to be jealous again? Let us talk of you and me, and never mind who *them* is. You have rejected my proposal with just scorn; so now let me hear yours; for we must agree on something this very night. Tell me, now, what I can say or do to make you happy?"

Griffith was sore puzzled. "Alas! sweet Kate," said he, "I don't know what you can do for me now, except stay single for my sake."

"I should like nothing better," replied Kate, warmly, "but unfortunately they won't let me do that. Father Francis will be at me to-morrow, and insist on my marrying Mr. Neville."

"But you will refuse."

"I would, if I could but find a good excuse."

"Excuse? why, say you don't love him."

"Oh, they won't allow that for a reason."

"Then I am undone," sighed Griffith.

"No, no, you are not; if I could be brought to pretend I love somebody else. And really, if I don't quite love you, I like you too well to let you be unhappy. Besides, I cannot bear to rob you of these unlucky farms: I think there is nothing I would not do rather than that. I think — I would rather — do — something very silly indeed. But I suppose you don't want me to do that now! Why don't you answer me? Why don't you say something? Are you drunk, sir, as they pretend? or are you asleep? Oh, I can't speak any plainer; this is intolerable. Mr. Gaunt, I'm going to shut the window."

Griffith got alarmed, and it sharpened his wits. "Kate, Kate!" he cried, "what do you mean? am I in a dream? would you marry poor me after all?"

"How on earth can I tell, till I am asked?" inquired Kate, with an air of childlike innocence, and inspecting the stars attentively.

"Kate, will you marry me?" said Griffith, all in a flutter.

"Of course I will — if you will let me," replied Kate, coolly, but rather tenderly, too.

Griffith burst into raptures; Kate listened to them with a complacent smile; then delivered herself after this fashion: "You have very little to thank me for, dear Griffith. I don't exactly downright love you; but I could not rob you of those unlucky farms, and you refuse to take them back any way but this; so what can I do? And then, for all I don't love you, I find I am always unhappy if you are unhappy, and happy when you are happy; so it comes pretty much to the same thing. I declare I am sick of giving you pain, and a little sick of crying in consequence. There, I have cried more in the last fortnight than in all my life before, and you know nothing spoils one's beauty like crying; and then

you are so good, and kind, and true, and brave; and everybody is so unjust, and so unkind to you; papa and all. You were quite in the right about the duel, dear; he *is* an impudent puppy; and I threw dust in your eyes, and made you own you were in the wrong; and it was a great shame of me; but it was because I liked you best. I could take liberties with *you*, dear. And you are wounded for me; and now I have disinherited you; oh, I can't bear it, and I won't. My heart yearns for you; bleeds for you. I would rather die than you should be unhappy; I would rather follow you in rags round the world than marry a prince and make you wretched. Yes, dear, I am yours. Make me your wife; and then some day I dare say I shall love you as I ought."

She had never showed her heart to him like this before; and now it overpowered him. So, being also a little under vinous influence, he stammered out something, and then fairly blubbered with joy. Then what does Kate do, but cry for company!

Presently, to her surprise, he was half way up the turret, coming to her.

"Oh, take care! take care!" she cried. "You'll break your neck."

"Nay," cried he, "I must come at you, if I die for it."

The turret was ornamented from top to bottom with short ledges consisting of half bricks. This ledge, shallow as it was, gave a slight foothold, insufficient in itself, but he grasped the strong branches of the ivy with a powerful hand; and so between the two contrived to get up and hang himself out close to her.

"Sweet mistress," said he, "put out your hand to me; for I can't take it against your will this time; I have got but one arm."

But this she declined. "No, no," said she; "you do

nothing but torment and terrify me, — there." And so, gave it him; and he mumbled it.

This last feat won her quite. She thought no other man could have got to her there with two arms, and Griffith had done it with one. She said to herself, "How he loves me! more than his own neck." And then she thought, "I shall be wife to a strong man; that is one comfort."

In this softened mood she asked him demurely, would he take a friend's advice.

"If that friend is you, ay."

"Then," said she, "I'll do a downright brazen thing, now my hand is in. I declare I'll tell you how to secure me. You make me plight my troth with you this minute, and exchange rings with you, *whether I like or not;* engage my honor in this foolish business, and if you do that, I really do think you will have me in spite of them all. But there — la! am I worth all this trouble?"

Griffith did not share this chilling doubt. He poured forth his gratitude, and then told her he had got his mother's ring on his finger; "I meant to ask you to wear it," said he.

"And why didn't you?"

"Because you became an heiress all of a sudden."

"Well, what signifies which of us has the dross, so that there is enough for both?"

"That is true," said Griffith, approving his own sentiment, but not recognizing his own words. "Here's my mother's ring, on my little finger, sweet mistress. But I must ask you to draw it off, for I have but one hand."

Kate made a wry face. "Well, that is my fault," said she, "or I would not take it from you so."

She drew off his ring, and put it on her finger. Then she gave him her largest ring, and had to put it on his little finger for him.

"You are making a very forward girl of me," said she, pouting exquisitely.

He kissed her hand while she was doing it.

"Don't you be so silly," said she; "and, you horrid creature, how you smell of wine! The bullet, please."

"The bullet!" exclaimed Griffith. "What bullet?"

"*The* bullet. The one you were wounded with for my sake. I am told you put it in your pocket; and I see something bulge in your waistcoat. That bullet belongs to me now."

"I think you are a witch," said he. "I do carry it about next my heart. Take it out of my waistcoat, if you will be so good."

She blushed, and declined, and, with the refusal on her very lips, fished it out with her taper fingers. She eyed it with a sort of tender horror. The sight of it made her feel faint a moment. She told him so, and that she would keep it to her dying day. Presently her delicate finger found something was written on it. She did not ask him what it was, but withdrew, and examined it by her candle. Griffith had engraved it with these words: "I LOVE KATE."

He looked though the window, and saw her examine it by the candle. As she read the inscription, her face, glorified by the light, assumed a celestial tenderness he had never seen it wear before.

She came back, and leaned eloquently out, as if she would fly to him.

"Ah, Griffith! Griffith!" she murmured; and, somehow or other, their lips met in spite of all the difficulties, and grew together in a long and tender embrace.

It was the first time she had ever given him more than her hand to kiss, and the rapture repaid him for all.

But, as soon as she had made this great advance, virginal instinct suggested a proportionate retreat.

"You must go to bed," she said austerely; "you will catch your death of cold out here."

He remonstrated; she insisted. He held out. She smiled sweetly in his face, and shut the window in it pretty sharply, and disappeared. He went disconsolately down his ivy ladder. As soon as he was at the bottom, she opened the window again, and asked him, demurely, if he would do something to oblige her.

He replied like a lover: he was ready to be cut in pieces, drawn asunder with wild horses, and so on.

"Oh, I know you would do anything stupid for me," said she; "but will you do something clever for a poor girl that is in a fright at what she is going to do for you?"

"Give your orders, mistress," said Griffith; "and don't talk of me obliging you. I feel quite ashamed to hear you talk so: to-night especially."

"Well, then," said Kate, "first and foremost, I want you to throw yourself on Father Francis's neck."

"I'll throw myself on Father Francis's neck," said Griffith stoutly. "Is that all?"

"No; nor half. Once upon his neck, you must say something. There — I had better settle the very words, or, perhaps, you will make a mess of it. Say after me now, 'O Father Francis, 'tis to you I owe her!'"

"O Father Francis, 'tis to you I owe her!"

"You and I are friends for life."

"You and I are friends for life."

"And mind, there is always a bed in our home for you, and a plate at our table, and a right welcome, come when you will."

Griffith repeated this last correctly; but, when requested to say the whole, broke down. Kate had to repeat the oration a dozen times; and he said it after her, like a Sunday-school scholar, till he had it pat.

The task achieved, he inquired of her what Father Francis was to say in reply.

At this question Kate showed considerable alarm.

"Gracious heavens!" she cried; "you must not stop talking to him. He will turn you inside out, and I shall be undone. Nay, you must gabble those words out, and then run away as hard as you can gallop."

"But is it true?" asked Griffith: "is he so much my friend?"

"Hum!" said Kate; "it is quite true; and he is not at all your friend. There, don't you puzzle yourself, and pester me; but do as you are bid, or we are both undone."

Quelled by a menace so mysterious, Griffith promised blind obedience; and Kate thanked him, and bade him good-night, and ordered him peremptorily to bed.

He went.

She beckoned him back.

He came.

She leaned out, and inquired, in a soft, delicious whisper, as follows: "Are you happy, dearest?"

"Ay, Kate, the happiest of the happy."

"Then, so am I," she murmured.

And now she slowly closed the window, and gradually retired from the eyes of her enraptured lover.

CHAPTER XII.

But while Griffith was thus sweetly employed, his neglected guests were dispersing, not without satirical comments on their truant host. Two or three, however, remained, and slept in the house, upon special invitation. And that invitation came from Squire Peyton. He chose to conclude that Griffith, disappointed by the will, had vacated the premises in disgust, and had left him in charge of them: accordingly he assumed the master with alacrity, and ordered beds for Neville and Father Francis and Major Rickards and another. The weather was inclement, and the roads heavy, so the gentlemen thus distinguished accepted Mr. Peyton's offer cordially.

There were a great many things sung and said at the festive board in the course of the evening; but very few of them would amuse or interest the reader as they did the hearers. One thing, however, must not be passed by, as it had its consequences: Major Rickards drank bumpers apiece to the King, the Prince, Church, and State, the army, the navy, and Kate Peyton. By the time he got to her, two-thirds of his discretion had oozed away in loyalty, *esprit du corps*, and port wine; so he sang the young lady's praises in vinous terms, and, of course, immortalized the very exploit she most desired to consign to oblivion: *Arma viraginemque canebat.* He sang the duel, and in a style which I could not, consistently with the interests of literature, reproduce on a larger scale. Hasten we to the concluding versicles of his song.

"So then, sir, we placed our men for the third time,

and you may take my word for it, one or both of these heroes would have bit the dust at that discharge; but, by Jove, sir, just as they were going to pull trigger, in galloped your adorable daughter, and swooned off her foaming horse in the middle of us. Disarmed us, sir, in a moment, melted our valor, bewitched our senses; and the great god of war had to retreat before little Cupid, and the charms of beauty in distress."

"Little idiot!" observed the tender parent; and was much distempered.

He said no more about it to Major Rickards; but, when they all retired for the night, he undertook to show Father Francis his room, and sat in it with him a good half-hour, talking about Kate.

"Here's a pretty scandal!" said he; "I must marry the silly girl out of hand, before this gets wind; and you must help me."

In a word, the result of the conference was that Kate should be publicly engaged to Neville to-morrow, and married to him as soon as her month's mourning should be over.

The conduct of the affair was confided to Father Francis, as having unbounded influence with her.

CHAPTER XIII.

Next morning Mr. Peyton was up betimes in his character of host, and ordered the servants about, and was in high spirits; only they gave place to amazement when Griffith Gaunt came down, and played the host; and was in high spirits.

Neville too watched his rival, and was puzzled at his radiancy.

So breakfast passed in general mystification. Kate, who could have thrown a light, did not come down to breakfast. She was on her defence.

She made her first appearance out of doors.

Very early in the morning, Mr. Peyton, in his quality of master, had ordered the gardener to cut and sweep the snow off the gravel walk that went round the lawn. And on this path Miss Peyton was seen walking briskly to and fro in the frosty but sunny air.

Griffith saw her first, and ran out to bid her good-morning.

Her reception of him was a farce: she made him a stately courtesy for the benefit of the three faces glued against the panes, but her words were incongruous. "You wretch," said she, "don't come here: hide about, dearest, till you see me with Father Francis. I'll raise my hand *so*, when you are to cuddle him, and fib. There, make me a low bow, and retire."

He obeyed, and the whole thing looked mighty formal and ceremonious from the breakfast-room.

"With your good leave, gentlemen," said Father Francis, dryly, "I will be the next to pay my respects

to her." With this he opened the window and stepped out.

Kate saw him, and felt very nervous; she met him with apparent delight.

He bestowed his morning benediction on her, and then they walked silently side by side on the gravel; and from the dining-room window it looked like anything but what it was, — a fencing match.

Father Francis was the first to break silence. He congratulated her on her good fortune, and on the advantage it might prove to the true Church.

Kate waited quietly till he had quite done, and then said, "What, may I go into a convent *now*, that I can bribe the door open?"

The scratch was feline, feminine, sudden, and sharp. But, alas! Father Francis only smiled at it. Though not what we call spiritually-minded, he was a man of a Christian temper. "Not with my good will, my daughter," said he: "I am of the same mind still, and more than ever. You must marry forthwith, and rear children in the true faith."

"What a hurry you are in!"

"Your own conduct has made it necessary."

"Why, what have I done now?"

"No harm; it was a good and humane action to prevent bloodshed, but the world is not always worthy of good actions. People are beginning to make free with your name for your interfering in the duel."

Kate fired up. "Why can't people mind their own business?"

"I do not exactly know," said the priest coolly, "nor is it worth inquiring: we must take human nature as it is, and do for the best. You must marry him, and stop their tongues."

Kate pretended to reflect. "I believe you are right,"

said she at last; "and indeed I must do as you would have me, for, to tell the truth — in an unguarded moment — I pitied him so — that I half promised I *would*."

"Indeed!" said Father Francis. "This is the first I have heard of it."

Kate replied that was no wonder, for it was only last night she had so committed herself.

"Last night!" said Father Francis; "how can that be? He was never out of my sight till we went to bed."

"Oh, there I beg to differ," said the lady. "While you were all tippling in the dining-room, he was better employed, — making love by moonlight. And, oh, what a terrible thing opportunity is, and the moon another. There! what with the moonlight — and my pitying him so — and all he has suffered for me — and my being rich now, and having something to give him — we two are engaged. See, else: this was his mother's ring; and he has mine."

"Mr. Neville?"

"Mr. Neville? No. My old servant, to be sure. What, do you think I would go and marry for wealth, when I have enough and to spare of my own? Oh! what an opinion you must have of me."

Father Francis was staggered by this adroit thrust. However, after a considerable silence, he recovered himself, and inquired, gravely, why she had given him no hint of all this the other night, when he had diverted her from a convent and advised her to marry Neville.

"That you never did, I'll be sworn," said Kate.

Father Francis reflected. "Not in so many words, perhaps, but I said enough to show you."

"Oh!" said Kate, "such a matter was too serious for hints and innuendoes: if you wanted me to jilt my old servant and wed an acquaintance of yesterday, why not

say so plainly? I dare say I should have obeyed you, and been unhappy for life, but now my honor is solemnly engaged, my faith is plighted; and were even you to urge me to break faith, and behave dishonorably, I should resist. I would liever take poison and die."

Father Francis looked at her steadily, and she colored to the brow.

"You are a very apt young lady," said he; "you have outwitted your director. That may be my fault as well as yours; so I advise you to provide yourself with another director, whom you will be unable, or unwilling, to outwit."

Kate's high spirit fell before this: she turned her eyes, full of tears, on him.

"Oh, do not desert me, now that I shall need you more than ever to guide me in my new duties. Forgive me; I did not know my own heart — quite. I'll go into a convent now, if I must; but I can't marry any man but poor Griffith. Ah, father, he is more generous than any of us. Would you believe it? when he thought Bolton and Hernshaw were coming to him, he said if I married him I should have the money to build a convent with. He knows how fond I am of a convent."

"He was jesting: his religion would not allow it."

"His religion!" cried Kate. Then, lifting her eyes to heaven, and looking just like an angel, "Love is *his* religion," said she warmly.

"Then his religion is heathenism," said the priest grimly.

"Nay, there is too much charity in it for that," retorted Kate keenly.

Then she looked down like a cunning, guilty thing, and murmured, "One of the things I esteem him for is, he always speaks well of *you*. To be sure, just now the poor soul thinks you are his best friend with me. But

that is my fault: I as good as told him so; and it is true, after a fashion, for you kept me out of the convent that was his only real rival. Why, here he comes. Oh, father, now don't you go and tell him you side with Mr. Neville!"

At this crisis Griffith, who, to tell the truth, had received a signal from Kate, rushed at Father Francis, and fell upon his neck, and said with great rapidity, "Oh, Father Francis, 'tis to you I owe her: you and I are friends for life. So long as we have a house there is a bed in it for you; and whilst we have a table to sit down to, there's a plate at it for you, and a welcome, come when you will."

Having gabbled these words, he winked at Kate and fled swiftly.

Father Francis was taken aback a little by this sudden burst of affection.

First he stared, then he knitted his brows, then he pondered.

Kate stole a look at him, and her eyes sought the ground.

"That is the gentleman you arranged matters with last night?" said he dryly.

"Yes," replied Kate faintly.

"Was this scene part of the business?"

"O father!"

"Why I ask, he did it so unnatural. Mr. Gaunt is a worthy, hospitable gentleman: he and I are very good friends; and really I never doubted that I should be welcome in his house — until this moment."

"And can you doubt it now?"

"Almost: his manner just now was so hollow, so forced; not a word of all that came from his heart, you know."

"Then his heart is changed very lately."

The priest shook his head. "Anything more like a puppet, and a parrot to boot, I never saw. 'Twas done so timely too; he ran in upon our discourse. Let me see your hand, mistress. Why, where is the string with which you pulled yonder machine in so pat upon the word?"

"Spare me!" muttered Kate, faintly.

"Then do you drop deceit and the silly cunning of your sex, and speak to me from your heart, or not at all." (Diapason.)

At this Kate began to whimper. "Father," she said, "show me some mercy." Then, suddenly clasping her hands: "HAVE PITY ON HIM, AND ON ME."

This time Nature herself seemed to speak, and the eloquent cry went clean through the priest's heart. "Ah!" said he; and his own voice trembled a little, "now you are as strong as your cunning was weak. Come, I see how it is with you; and I am human, and have been young, and a lover into the bargain, before I was a priest. There, dry thy eyes, child, and go to thy room; he thou couldst not trust shall bear the brunt for thee; this once."

Then Kate bowed her fair head and kissed the horrid paw of him that had administered so severe but salutary a pat. She hurried away up-stairs, right joyful at the unexpected turn things had taken.

Father Francis, thus converted to her side, lost no time; he walked into the dining-room and told Neville he had bad news for him. "Summon all your courage, my young friend," he said, with feeling; "and remember that this world is full of disappointments."

Neville said nothing; but rose and stood rather pale, waiting like a man for the blow. Its nature he more than half guessed: he had been at the window.

It fell.

"She is engaged to Gaunt, since last night: and she loves him."

"The double-faced jade!" cried Peyton, with an oath. "The heartless coquette!" groaned Neville.

Father Francis made excuses for her: "Nay, nay, she is not the first of her sex that did not know her own mind all at once. Besides, we men are blind in matters of love: perhaps a woman would have read her from the first. After all she was not bound to give us the eyes to read a female heart."

He next reminded Neville that Gaunt had been her servant for years. "You knew that," said he, "yet you came between them — at your peril. Put yourself in his place: say you had succeeded; would not his wrong be greater than yours is now? Come, be brave; be generous; he is wounded, he is disinherited; only his love is left him; 'tis the poor man's lamb, and would you take it?"

"Oh, I have not a word to say against the *man*," said George, with a mighty effort.

"And what use quarrelling with a woman?" suggested the practical priest.

"None whatever," said George, sullenly. After a moment's silence he rang the bell feverishly. "Order my horse round directly," said he; then he sat down, and buried his face in his hands, and did not, and could not, listen to the voice of consolation.

Now the house was full of spies in petticoats, amateur spies, that ran and told the mistress everything of their own accord, to curry favor.

And this no doubt was the cause that, just as the groom walked the piebald out of the stable towards the hall-door, a maid came to Father Francis with a little note; he opened it, and found these words written faintly, in a fine Italian hand: —

"I scarce knew my own heart till I saw him wounded and poor, and myself rich at his expense. Entreat Mr. Neville to forgive me."

He handed the note to Neville without a word.

Neville read it, and his lip trembled; but he said nothing, and presently went out into the hall, and put on his hat, for he saw his nag at the door.

Father Francis followed him, and said, sorrowfully, "What, not one word in reply to so humble a request?"

"Well, here's my reply," said George, grinding his teeth. "She knows French, though she pretends not.

> 'Le bruit est pour le fat, la plainte est pour le sot,
> L'honnête homme trompé s'éloigne et ne dit mot.'"

And with this he galloped furiously away.

He buried himself at Neville's Cross for several days, and would neither see nor speak to a soul. His heart was sick, his pride lacerated. He even shed some scalding tears in secret; though to look at him that seemed impossible.

So passed a bitter week; and in the course of it he bethought him of the tears he had made a true Italian lady shed; and never pitied her a grain till now.

He was going abroad: on his desk lay a little crumpled paper. It was Kate's entreaty for forgiveness. He had ground it in his hand, and ridden away with it.

Now he was going away, he resolved to answer her.

He wrote a letter full of bitter reproaches; read it over, and tore it up.

He wrote a satirical and cutting letter; read it, and tore it up.

He wrote her a mawkish letter; read it, and tore it up.

The priest's words, scorned at first, had sunk into him a little.

He walked about the room, and tried to see it all like a bystander.

He examined her writing closely: the pen had scarcely marked the paper. They were the timidest strokes. The writer seemed to kneel to him. He summoned all his manhood, his fortitude, his generosity, and, above all, his high-breeding, and produced the following letter; and this one he sent: —

MISTRESS KATE, — I leave England to-day for your sake; and shall never return unless the day shall come when I can look on you but as a friend. The love that ends in hate, that is too sorry a thing to come betwixt you and me.

If you have used me ill, your punishment is this: you have given me the right to say to you — I forgive you.

GEORGE NEVILLE.

And he went straight to Italy.

Kate laid his note upon her knee, and sighed deeply; and said, "Poor fellow! How noble of him! What *can* such men as this see in any woman to go and fall in love with her?"

Griffith found her with a tear in her eye. He took her out walking, and laid all his radiant plans of wedded life before her. She came back flushed, and beaming with complacency and beauty.

Old Peyton was brought to consent to the marriage. Only he attached one condition, that Bolton and Hernshaw should be settled on Kate for her separate use.

To this Griffith assented readily; but Kate refused plump. "What, give him *myself*, and then grudge him my *estates!*" said she, with a look of lofty and beautiful scorn at her male advisers.

But Father Francis, having regard to the temporal interests of his Church, exerted his strength and pertinacity, and tired her out; so those estates were put into trustees' hands, and tied up as tight as wax.

This done, Griffith Gaunt and Kate Peyton were married, and made the finest pair that wedded in the county that year.

As the bells burst into a merry peal, and they walked out of church man and wife, their path across the churchyard was strewed thick with flowers, emblematic no doubt of the path of life that lay before so handsome a couple.

They spent the honeymoon in London, and tasted earthly felicity.

Yet did not quarrel after it; but subsided into the quiet complacency of wedded life.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. and Mrs. Gaunt lived happily together — as times went.

A fine girl and boy were born to them; and need I say how their hearts expanded and exulted; and seemed to grow twice as large?

The little boy was taken from them at three years old: and how can I convey to any but a parent the anguish of that first bereavement?

Well, they suffered it together, and that poignant grief was one tie more between them.

For many years they did not furnish any exciting or even interesting matter to this narrator. And all the better for them: without those happy periods of dulness our lives would be hell, and our hearts eternally bubbling and boiling in a huge pot made hot with thorns.

In the absence of striking incidents, it may be well to notice the progress of character, and note the tiny seeds of events to come.

Neither the intellectual nor the moral character of any person stands stock-still: a man improves, or he declines. Mrs. Gaunt had a great taste for reading; Mr. Gaunt had not: what was the consequence? at the end of seven years the lady's understanding had made great strides; the gentleman's had, apparently, retrograded.

Now we all need a little excitement, and we all seek it, and get it by hook or by crook. The girl who satisfies that natural craving with what the canting dunces of the day call a "sensational" novel, and the girl who does it by waltzing till daybreak, are sisters; only one

obtains the result intellectually, and the other obtains it like a young animal, and a pain in her empty head next day.

Mrs. Gaunt could enjoy company, but was never dull with a good book. Mr. Gaunt was a pleasant companion, but dull out of company. So, rather than not have it, he would go to the parlor of the "Red Lion," and chat and sing with the yeomen and rollicking young squires that resorted thither: and this was matter of grief and astonishment to Mrs. Gaunt.

It was balanced by good qualities she knew how to appreciate. Morals were much looser then than now; and more than one wife of her acquaintance had a rival in the village, or even among her own domestics; but Griffith had no loose inclinations of that kind, and never gave her a moment's uneasiness. He was constancy and fidelity in person.

Sobriety had not yet been invented. But Griffith was not so intemperate as most squires; he could always mount the stairs to tea, and generally without staggering.

He was uxorious, and it used to come out after his wine. This Mrs. Gaunt permitted at first, but by and by says she, expanding her delicate nostrils, "You may be as affectionate as you please, dear, and you may smell of wine, if you will; but please not smell of wine and be affectionate at the same moment. I value your affection too highly to let you disgust me with it."

And the model husband yielded to this severe restriction, and, as it never occurred to him to give up his wine, he forbore to be affectionate in his cups.

One great fear Mrs. Gaunt had entertained before marriage, ceased to haunt her. Now and then her quick eye saw Griffith writhe at the great influence her director had with her; but he never spoke out to offend her, and she, like a good wife, saw, smiled, and adroitly, tenderly

soothed; and this was nothing compared to what she had feared.

Griffith saw his wife admired by other men, yet never chid nor chafed. The merit of this belonged in a high degree to herself. The fact is, that Kate Peyton, even before marriage, was not a coquette at heart, though her conduct might easily bear that construction: and she was now an experienced matron, and knew how to be as charming as ever, yet check or parry all approaches of gallantry on the part of her admirers. Then Griffith observed how delicate and prudent his lovely wife was, without ostentatious prudery; and his heart was at peace.

He was the happier of the two, for he looked up to his wife, as well as loved her, whereas she was troubled at times with a sense of superiority to her husband. She was amiable enough, and wise enough, to try and shut her eyes to it; and often succeeded; but not always.

Upon the whole, they were a contented couple; though the lady's dreamy eyes seemed still to be exploring earth and sky in search of something they had not yet found, even in wedded life.

They lived at Hernshaw. A letter had been found among Mr. Charlton's papers explaining his will. He counted on their marrying, and begged them to live at the castle. He had left it on his wife's death; it reminded him too keenly of happier days; but, as he drew near his end, and must leave all earthly things, he remembered the old house with tenderness, and put out his dying hand to save it from falling into decay.

Unfortunately considerable repairs were needed, and, as Kate's property was tied up so tight, Griffith's two thousand pounds went in repairing the house, lawn, park railings, and walled gardens; went, every penny, and left the bridge over the lake still in a battered, rotten, and, in a word, picturesque condition.

This lake was, by the older inhabitants, sometimes called the "mere," and sometimes the "fish-pools;" it resembled an hour-glass in shape, only curved like a crescent.

In mediæval times it had no doubt been a main defence of the place. It was very deep in parts, especially at the waist or narrow that was spanned by the decayed bridge. There were hundreds of carp and tench in it older than any he in Cumberland, and also enormous pike and eels; and fish from one to five pounds' weight by the million. The water literally teemed from end to end; and this was a great comfort to so good a Catholic as Mrs. Gaunt. When she was seized with a desire to fast, and that was pretty often, the gardener just went down to the lake and flung a casting-net in some favorite hole, and drew out half a bushel the first cast; or planted a flue-net round a patch of weeds, then belabored the weeds with a long pole, and a score of fine fish were sure to run out into the meshes.

The "mere" was clear as plate glass, and came to the edge of the shaven lawn, and reflected flowers, turf, and overhanging shrubs, deliciously.

Yet an ill name brooded over its seductive waters. For two persons had been drowned in it during the last hundred years: and the last one was the parson of the parish, returning from the squire's dinner in the normal condition of a guest, at that epoch. But what most affected the popular mind, was, not the jovial soul hurried into eternity, but the material circumstance that the greedy pike had cleared the flesh off his bones in a single night; so that little more than a skeleton, with here and there a black rag hanging to it, had been recovered next morning.

This ghastly detail being stoutly maintained and constantly repeated by two ancient eye-witnesses, whose

one melodramatic incident and treasure it was, the rustic mind saw no beauty whatever in those pellucid waters, where flowers did glass themselves.

As for the women of the village, they looked on this sheet of water as a trap for their poor bodies, and those of their children, and spoke of it as a singular hardship in their lot, that Hernshaw mere had not been filled up threescore years agone.

The castle itself was no castle, nor had it been for centuries: it was just a house with battlements; but attached to the stable was an old square tower that really had formed part of the mediæval castle.

However, that unsubstantial shadow, a name, is often more durable than the thing; especially in rural parts: but, indeed, what is there in a name for Time's teeth to catch hold of?

Though no castle, it was a delightful abode. The drawing-room and dining-room had both spacious bay windows, opening on to the lawn that sloped very gradually down to the clear lake, and there was mirrored. On this sweet lawn the inmates and guests walked for sun and mellow air, and often played bowls at eventide.

On the other side was the drive up to the house door, and a sweep, or small oval plot, of turf, surrounded by gravel; and a gate at the corner of this sweep opened into a grove of the grandest old spruce firs in the island.

This grove, dismal in winter, and awful at night, was deliciously cool and sombre in the dogdays. The trees were spires, and their great stems stood serried like infantry in column, and flung a mighty canopy of sombre plumes overhead. A strange, antique, and classic grove —*nulli penetrabilis astro.*

This retreat was enclosed on three sides by a wall, and on the east side came nearly to the house; a few laurel bushes separated the two. At night it was shunned

religiously, on account of the ghosts. Even by daylight it was little frequented, except by one person, and she took to it amazingly. That person was Mrs. Gaunt. There seems to be, even in educated women, a singular, instinctive love of twilight; and here was twilight at high noon. The place, too, suited her dreamy, meditative nature. Hither, then, she often retired for peace and religious contemplation, and moved slowly in and out among the tall stems, or sat still, with her thoughtful brow leaned on her white hand, till the cool, umbrageous retreat got to be called among the servants, "The Dame's Haunt."

This, I think, is all needs to be told about the mere place where the Gaunts lived comfortably many years, and little dreamed of the strange events in store for them; little knew the passions that slumbered in their own bosoms, and, like other volcanoes, bided their time.

CHAPTER XV.

One day at dinner, Father Francis let them know that he was ordered to another part of the county, and should no longer be able to enjoy their hospitality. "I am sorry for it," said Griffith, heartily; and Mrs. Gaunt echoed him out of politeness; but, when husband and wife came to talk it over in private, she let out all of a sudden, and for the first time, that the spiritual coldness of her governor had been a great misfortune to her all these years. "His mind," said she, "is set on earthly things. Instead of helping the angels to raise my thoughts to heaven and heavenly things, he drags me down to earth. Oh, that man's soul was born without wings."

Griffith ventured to suggest that Francis was, nevertheless, an honest man, and no mischief-maker.

Mrs. Gaunt soon disposed of this. "Oh, there are plenty of honest men in the world," said she; "but in one's spiritual director, one needs something more than that, and I have pined for it like a thirsty soul in the desert all these years. Poor good man, I love him dearly; but, thank Heaven, he is going."

The next time Francis came, Mrs. Gaunt took an opportunity to inquire, but in the most delicate way, who was to be his successor.

"Well," said he, "I fear you will have no one for the present, I mean no one very fit to direct you in practical matters; but in all that tends directly to the welfare of the soul you will have one young in years but old in good works, and very much my superior in piety."

"I think you do yourself injustice, father," said Mrs. Gaunt, sweetly. She was always polite; and, to be always polite, you must be sometimes insincere.

"No, my daughter," said Father Francis, quietly; "thank God, I know my own defects, and they teach me a little humility. I discharge my religious duties punctually, and find them wholesome and composing; but I lack that holy unction, that spiritual imagination, by which more favored Christians have fitted themselves to converse with angels. I have too much body, I suppose, and too little soul. I own to you that I cannot look forward to the hour of death as a happy release from the burden of the flesh. Life is pleasant to me; immortality tempts me not; the pure in heart delight me; but in the sentimental part of religion I feel myself dry and barren. I fear God, and desire to do His will, but I cannot love Him as the saints have done; my spirit is too dull, too gross. I have often been unable to keep pace with you in your pious and lofty aspirations, and this softens my regret at quitting you; for you will be in better hands, my daughter."

Mrs. Gaunt was touched by her old friend's humility, and gave him both hands, with the tears in her eyes. But she said nothing. The subject was delicate, and really she could not honestly contradict him.

A day or two afterwards he brought his successor to the house; a man so remarkable that Mrs. Gaunt almost started at first sight of him. Born of an Italian mother, his skin was dark and his eyes coal black; yet his ample but symmetrical forehead was singularly white and delicate. Very tall and spare, and both face and figure were of that exalted kind which make ordinary beauty seem dross. In short, he was one of those ethereal priests the Roman Catholic Church produces every now and then by way of incredible contrast to the thick-set peasants in

black that form her staple. This Brother Leonard looked and moved like a being who had come down from some higher sphere to pay the world a very little visit, and be very kind and patient with it all the time.

He was presented to Mrs. Gaunt, and bowed calmly, coldly, and with a certain mixture of humility and superiority, and gave her but one tranquil glance, then turned his eyes inward as before.

Mrs. Gaunt, on the contrary, was almost fluttered at being presented so suddenly to one who seemed to her Religion embodied. She blushed, and looked timidly at him, and was anxious not to make an unfavorable impression.

She found it, however, very difficult to make any impression at all. Leonard had no small-talk, and met her advances in that line with courteous monosyllables; and when she, upon this, turned and chatted with Father Francis, he did not wait for an opening to strike in, but sought a shelter from her commonplaces in his own thoughts.

Then Mrs. Gaunt yielded to her genuine impulse, and began to talk about the prospects of the Church, and what might be done to reconvert the British Isles to the true faith. Her cheek flushed, and her eye shone with the theme; and Francis smiled paternally; but the young priest drew back. Mrs. Gaunt saw in a moment that he disapproved of a woman meddling with so high a matter uninvited. If he had said so, she had spirit enough to have resisted; but the cold, lofty look of polite but grave disapproval dashed her courage and reduced her to silence.

She soon recovered so far as to be piqued. She gave her whole attention to Francis, and, on parting with her guests, she courtesied coldly to Leonard, and said to Francis, "Ah, my dear friend, I foresee I shall miss you terribly."

I am afraid this pretty speech was intended as a side cut at Leonard.

But on the impassive ice the lightnings play.

Her new confessor retired, and left her with a sense of inferiority, which would have been pleasing to her woman's nature, if Leonard himself had appeared less conscious of it, and had shown ever so little approval of herself: but, impressed upon her too sharply, it piqued and mortified her.

However, like a gallant champion, she awaited another encounter. She so rarely failed to please, she could not accept defeat.

Father Francis departed.

Mrs. Gaunt soon found that she really missed him. She had got into a habit of running to her confessor twice a week, and to her director nearly every day that he did not come of his own accord to her.

Her good sense showed her at once she must not take up Brother Leonard's time in this way. She went a long while, for her, without confession; at last she sent a line to Leonard asking him when it would be convenient to him to confess her. Leonard wrote back to say that he received penitents in the chapel for two hours after matins every Monday, Tuesday, and Saturday.

This implied first come, first served; and was rather galling to Mrs. Gaunt.

However, she rode one morning, with her groom behind her, and had to wait until an old woman in a red cloak and black bonnet was first disposed of. She confessed a heap. And presently the soft but chill tones of Brother Leonard broke in with these freezing words: "My daughter, excuse me; but confession is one thing, gossip about ourselves is another."

This distinction was fine, but fatal. The next minute

the fair penitent was in her carriage, her eyes filled with tears of mortification.

"The man is a spiritual machine," said she; and her pride was mortified to the core.

In these happy days she used to open her heart to her husband; and she went so far as to say some bitter little feminine things of her new confessor, before him.

He took no notice at first; but at last he said one day, "Well, I am of your mind; he is very poor company compared with that jovial old blade, Francis. But why so many words, Kate? You don't use to bite twice at a cherry; if the milksop is not to your taste, give him the sack and be hanged to him." And with this homely advice, Squire Gaunt dismissed the matter and went to the stable to give his mare a ball.

So you see Mrs. Gaunt was discontented with Francis for not being an enthusiast, and nettled with Leonard for being one.

The very next Sunday morning she went and heard Leonard preach. His first sermon was an era in her life. After twenty years of pulpit prosers, there suddenly rose before her a sacred orator; an orator born; blest with that divine and thrilling eloquence that no heart can really resist. He prepared his great theme with art at first; but, once warm, it carried him away, and his hearers went with him like so many straws on the flood. And in the exercise of this great gift the whole man seemed transfigured; abroad, he was a languid, rather slouching priest, who crept about, a picture of delicate humility, but with a shade of meanness; for, religious prejudice apart, it is ignoble to sweep the wall in passing as he did, and eye the ground; but, once in the pulpit, his figure rose and swelled majestically, and seemed to fly over them all like a guardian angel's; his sallow cheek burned, his great Italian eye shot black lightning

at the impenitent, and melted ineffably when he soothed the sorrowful.

Observe that great, mean, brown bird in the Zoölogical Gardens, which sits so tame on its perch, and droops and slouches like a drowsy duck. That is the great and soaring eagle. Who would believe it, to look at him? Yet all he wants is to be put in his right place instead of his wrong. He is not himself in man's cages, belonging to God's sky. Even so Leonard was abroad in the world, but at home in the pulpit: and so he somewhat crept and slouched about the parish; but soared like an eagle in his native air.

Mrs. Gaunt sat thrilled, enraptured, melted. She hung upon his words; and, when they ceased, she still sat motionless, spell-bound; loath to believe that accents so divine could really come to an end.

Even whilst all the rest were dispersing, she sat quite still, and closed her eyes. For her soul was too high-strung now to endure the chit-chat she knew would attack her on the road home — chit-chat that had been welcome enough, coming home from other preachers.

And by this means she came hot and undiluted to her husband; she laid her white hand on his shoulder, and said, "Oh, Griffith, I have heard the voice of God."

Griffith looked alarmed, and rather shocked than elated.

Mrs. Gaunt observed that, and tacked on, "Speaking by the lips of His servant." But she fired again the next moment, and said, "The grave hath given us back St. Paul in the Church's need; and I have heard him this day."

"Good heavens! where?"

"At St. Mary's Chapel."

Then Griffith looked very incredulous. Then she gushed out with, "What, because it is a small chapel

you think a great saint cannot be in it! Why, our Saviour was born in a stable, if you go to that."

"Well, but, my dear, consider," said Griffith; "who ever heard of comparing a living man to St. Paul, for preaching? Why, he was an apostle, for one thing; and there are no apostles nowadays. He made Felix tremble on his throne, and almost persuaded Whatsename, another heathen gentleman, to be a Christian."

"That is true," said the lady, thoughtfully; "but he sent one man that *we* know of to sleep. Catch Brother Leonard sending any man to sleep! And then nobody will ever say of *him* that he was long preaching."

"Why, I do say it," replied Griffith. "By the same token, I have been waiting dinner for you this half-hour, along of his preaching."

"Ah, that's because you did not hear him," retorted Mrs. Gaunt; "if you had, it would have seemed too short, and you would have forgotten all about your dinner for once."

Griffith made no reply. He even looked vexed at her enthusiastic admiration. She saw, and said no more. But after dinner she retired to the grove, and thought of the sermon and the preacher: thought of them all the more that she was discouraged from enlarging on them.

And it would have been kinder, and also wiser, of Griffith, if he had encouraged her to let out her heart to him on this subject, although it did not happen to interest him. A husband should not chill an enthusiastic wife, and, above all, should never separate himself from her favorite topic, when she loves him well enough to try and share it with him.

Mrs. Gaunt, however, though her feelings were quick, was not cursed with a sickly or irritable sensibility; nor, on the other hand, was she one of these lovely little bores who cannot keep their tongues off their favorite theme.

She quietly let the subject drop for a whole week; but the next Sunday morning she asked her husband if he would do her a little favor.

"I'm more likely to say ay than nay," was the cheerful reply.

"It is just to go to chapel with me; and then you can judge for yourself."

Griffith looked rather sheepish at this proposal; and said he could not very well do that.

"Why not, dearest, just for once?"

"Well, you see, parties run so high in this parish; and everything one does is noted. Why, if I was to go to chapel, they'd say directly, 'Look at Griffith Gaunt: he is so tied to his wife's apron, he is going to give up the faith of his ancestors.'"

"The faith of your ancestors! That is a good jest. The faith of your grandfather at the outside: the faith of your ancestors was the faith of mine and me."

"Well, don't let us differ about a word," said Griffith; "you know what I mean. Did ever I ask you to go to church with me? and, if I were to ask you, would you go?"

Mrs. Gaunt colored; but would not give in. "That is not the same thing," said she. "I do profess religion: you do not. You scarce think of God on week-days; and, indeed, never mention His name except in the way of swearing; and on Sunday you go to church — for what? to doze before dinner, you know you do. Come now, with you 'tis no question of religion, but just of nap or no nap: for Brother Leonard won't let you sleep, I warn you fairly."

Griffith shook his head. "You are too hard on me, wife. I know I am not so good as you are, and never shall be; but that is not the fault of the Protestant faith, which hath reared so many holy men: and some of 'em

our *ancestors* burnt alive, and will burn in hell themselves for the deed. But, look you, sweetheart, if I'm not a saint, I'm a gentleman, and, say I wear my faith loose, I won't drag it in the dirt none the more for that. So you must excuse me."

Mrs. Gaunt was staggered; and if Griffith had said no more, I think she would have withdrawn her request, and so the matter ended. But persons unversed in argument can seldom let well alone; and this simple squire must needs go on to say, "Besides, Kate, it would come to the parson's ears, and he is a friend of mine, you know. Why, I shall be sure to meet him to-morrow."

"Ay," retorted the lady, "by the cover-side. Well, when you do, tell him you refused your wife your company for fear of offending the religious views of a fox-hunting parson."

"Nay, Kate," said Griffith, "this is not to ask thy man to go with thee: 'tis to say go he must, willy-nilly." With that he rose and rang the bell. "Order the chariot," said he, "I am to go with our dame."

Mrs. Gaunt's face beamed with gratified pride and affection.

The chariot came round, and Griffith handed his dame in. He then gave an involuntary sigh, and followed her with a hang-dog look.

She heard the sigh, and saw the look, and laid her hand quickly on his shoulder, and said gently but coldly, "Stay you at home, my dear. We shall meet at dinner."

"As you will," said he, cheerfully: and they went their several ways. He congratulated himself on her clemency, and his own escape. She went along, sorrowful at having to drink so great a bliss alone; and thought it unkind and stupid of Griffith not to yield with a good grace, if he could yield at all; and, indeed, women seem cleverer

than men in this, that, when they resign their wills, they do it graciously and not by halves. Perhaps they are more accustomed to knock under; and you know practice makes perfect.

But every smaller feeling was swept away by the preacher, and Mrs. Gaunt came home full of pious and lofty thoughts.

She found her husband seated at the dinner-table, with one turnip before him; and even that was not comestible; for it was his grandfather's watch, with a face about the size of a new-born child's. "Forty-five minutes past one, Kate," said he, ruefully.

"Well, why not bid them serve the dinner?" said she, with an air of consummate indifference.

"What! dine alone o' Sunday? Why, you know I couldn't eat a morsel without you, set opposite."

Mrs. Gaunt smiled affectionately. "Well, then, my dear, we had better order dinner an hour later next Sunday."

"But that will upset the servants, and spoil their Sunday."

"And am I to be their slave?" said Mrs. Gaunt, getting a little warm. "Dinner! dinner! What! shall I starve my soul, by hurrying away from the oracles of God to a sirloin? Oh, these gross appetites! how they deaden the immortal half, and wall out heaven's music! For my part, I wish there was no such thing as eating and drinking; 'tis like falling from heaven down into the mud, to come back from such divine discourse and be greeted with 'dinner! dinner! dinner!'"

The next Sunday, after waiting half an hour for her, Griffith began his dinner without her.

And this time, on her arrival, instead of remonstrating with her, he excused himself. "Nothing," said he, "upsets a man's temper like waiting for his dinner."

"Well, but you have not waited."

"Yes, I did, a good half-hour. Till I could wait no longer."

"Well, dear, if I were you I would not have waited at all, or else waited till your wife came home."

"Ah, dame, that is all very well for you to say. You could live on hearing of sermons and smelling to rose-buds. You don't know what 'tis to be a hungry man."

The next Sunday he sat sadly down, and finished his dinner without her. And she came home and sat down to half-empty dishes; and ate much less than she used when she had him to keep her company in it.

Griffith, looking on disconsolate, told her she was more like a bird pecking, than a Christian eating of a Sunday.

"No matter, child," said she; "so long as my soul is filled with the bread of heaven."

Leonard's eloquence suffered no diminution, either in quantity or quality, and, after a while, Gaunt gave up his rule of never dining abroad on the Sunday. If his wife was not punctual, his stomach was: and he had not the same temptation to dine at home he used to have.

And, indeed, by degrees, instead of quietly enjoying his wife's company on that sweet day, he got to see less of her than on the week-days.

CHAPTER XVI.

Your mechanical preacher flings his words out happy-go-lucky; but the pulpit orator, like every other orator, feels his people's pulse as he speaks, and vibrates with them, and they with him.

So Leonard soon discovered he had a great listener in Mrs. Gaunt: she was always there whenever he preached, and her rapt attention never flagged. Her gray eyes never left his face, and, being upturned, the full orbs came out in all their grandeur, and seemed an angel's come down from heaven to hear him: for, indeed, to a very dark man, as Leonard was, the gentle radiance of a true Saxon beauty seems always more or less angelic.

By degrees this face became a help to the orator. In preaching he looked sometimes to it for sympathy, and lo, it was sure to be melting with sympathy. Was he led on to higher or deeper thoughts than most of his congregation could understand, he looked to this face to understand him; and lo, it had quite understood him, and was beaming with intelligence.

From a help and an encouragement it became a comfort and a delight to him.

On leaving the pulpit and cooling, he remembered its owner was no angel, but a woman of the world, and had put to him frivolous questions.

The illusion, however, was so beautiful that Leonard, being an imaginative man, was unwilling to dispel it by coming into familiar contact with Mrs. Gaunt. So he used to make his assistant visit her, and receive her when

she came to confess, which was very rarely; for she was discouraged by her first reception.

Brother Leonard lived in a sort of dwarf monastery, consisting of two cottages, an oratory, and a sepulchre. The two latter were old, but the cottages had been built expressly for him and another seminary priest who had been invited from France. Inside, these cottages were little more than cells; only the bigger had a kitchen which was a glorious place compared with the parlor; for it was illuminated with bright pewter plates, copper vessels, brass candlesticks, and a nice clean woman, with a plain gown kilted over a quilted silk petticoat; Betty Scarf, an old servant of Mrs. Gaunt's, who had married, and was now the widow Gough.

She stood at the gate one day as Mrs. Gaunt drove by; and courtesied, all beaming.

Mrs. Gaunt stopped the carriage, and made some kind and patronizing inquiries about her: and it ended in Betty asking her to come in and see her place. Mrs. Gaunt looked a little shy at that, and did not move. "Nay, they are both abroad till supper time," said Betty, reading her in a moment by the light of sex. Then Mrs. Gaunt smiled, and got out of her carriage. Betty took her in and showed her everything in doors and out. Mrs. Gaunt looked mighty demure and dignified, but scanned everything closely, only without seeming too curious.

The cold gloom of the parlor struck her. She shuddered, and said, "This would give me the vapors. But, doubtless, angels come and brighten it for *him*."

"Not always," said Betty. "I do see him with his head in his hand by the hour, and hear him sigh ever so loud as I pass the door. Why, one day he was fain to have me and my spinning-wheel aside him. Says he, 'Let me hear thy busy wheel, and see thee ply it.'

'And welcome,' says I. So I sat in his room and span, and he sat a-gloating of me as if he had never seen a woman spin hemp afore (he is a very simple man): and presently says he — but what signifies what *he* said?"

"Nay, Betty; if you please. I am much interested in him. He preaches so divinely."

"Ay," said Betty, "that's his gift. But a poor trencherman: and I declare I'm ashamed to eat all the vittels that are eaten here, and me but a woman."

"But what did he say to you that time?" asked Mrs. Gaunt, a little impatiently.

Betty cudgelled her memory. "Well, says he, 'my daughter' (the poor soul always calls me his daughter, and me old enough to be his mother mostly); says he, 'how comes it that you are never weary nor cast down, and yet you but serve a sinner like yourself; but I do often droop in my Master's service, and He is the Lord of heaven and earth?' Says I, 'I'll tell ye, sir: because ye don't eat enough o' vittels.'"

"What an answer!"

"Why, 'tis the truth, dame. And says I, 'If I was to be always fasting, like as you be, d'ye think I should have the heart to work from morn till night?' Now, wasn't I right?"

"I don't know till I hear what answer he made," said Mrs. Gaunt, with mean caution.

"Oh, he shook his head, and said he ate mortal food enow (poor simple body!), but drank too little of grace divine. That was his word."

Mrs. Gaunt was a good deal struck and affected by this revelation, and astonished at the slighting tone Betty took in speaking of so remarkable a man. The saying that "No man is a hero to his valet" was not yet current, or perhaps she would have been less surprised at that.

"Alas! poor man," said she, "and is it so? To hear him, I thought his soul was borne up night and day by angels' pinions" —

The widow interrupted her. "Ay, you hear him preach, and it is like God's trumpet mostly, and so much I say for him in all companies. But I see him directly after; he totters into this very room, and sits him down pale and panting, and one time like to swoon, and another all for crying, and then he is ever so dull and sad for the whole afternoon."

"And nobody knows this but you? You have got my old petticoat still, I see. I must look you up another."

"You are very good, dame, I am sure. 'Twill not come amiss; I've only this for Sundays and all. No, my lady, not a soul but me and you; I'm not one as tells tales out of doors: but I don't mind you, dame; you are my old mistress, and a discreet woman. 'Twill go no further than your ear."

Mrs. Gaunt told her she might rely on that. The widow then inquired after Mrs. Gaunt's little girl, and admired her dress, and described her own ailments, and poured out a continuous stream of topics bearing no affinity to each other except that they were all of them not worth mentioning. And all the while she thus discoursed, Mrs. Gaunt's thoughtful eyes looked straight over the chatterbox's white cap, and explored vacancy: and by-and-by she broke the current of twaddle with the air of a camelopard marching across a running gutter.

"Betsy Gough," said she, "I am thinking."

Mrs. Gough was struck dumb by an announcement so singular.

"I have heard, and I have read, that great and pious and learned men are often to seek in little simple things such as plain bodies have at their fingers' ends. So now if you and I could only teach him something for all he

has taught us. And, to be sure, we ought to be kind to him if we can; for, oh, Betty, my woman, 'tis a poor vanity to go and despise the great, and the learned, and the sainted, because forsooth, we find them out in some one little weakness, we that are all made up of weaknesses and defects. So now I sit me down in this very chair: so. And sit you there. Now let us, you and me, look at his room quietly, all over, and see what is wanting.

"First and foremost methinks this window should be filled with geraniums and jessamine and so forth. With all his learning perhaps he has to be taught the color of flowers and golden green leaves, with the sun shining through, how it soothes the eye and relieves the spirits; yet every woman born knows that. Then do but see this bare table! a purple cloth on that, I say."

"Which he will fling it out of the window, I say."

"Nay: for I'll embroider a cross in the middle with gold braid. Then a rose-colored blind would not be amiss; and there must be a good mirror facing the window; but indeed, if I had my way, I'd paint these horrid walls the first thing."

"How you run on, dame! Bless your heart, you'd turn his den into a palace: he won't suffer that; he is all for self-mortification, poor simple soul."

"Oh, not all at once, I did not mean," said Mrs. Gaunt; "but by little and little, you know. We must begin with the flowers: God made them; and so to be sure he will not spurn *them.*"

Betty began to enter into the plot. "Ay, ay," said she; "the flowers first; and so creep on. But nought will avail to make a man of him so long as he eats but of eggs and garden-stuff, like the beasts of the field, 'that to-day are, and to-morrow are cast into the oven.'"

Mrs. Gaunt smiled at this ambitious attempt of the

widow to apply Scripture. Then she said rather timidly, "Could you make his eggs into omelets? and so pound in a little meat with your small herbs; I dare say he would be none the wiser, and he so bent on high and heavenly things."

"You may take your oath of that."

"Well, then. And I shall send you some stock from the castle, and you can cook his vegetables in good strong gravy, unbeknown."

The widow Gough chuckled aloud.

"But stay," said Mrs. Gaunt; "for us to play the woman so, and delude a saint for his mere bodily weal—will it not be a sin, and a sacrilege to boot?"

"Let that flea stick in the wall," said Betty, contemptuously. "Find you the meat, and I'll find the deceit: for he is as poor as a rat into the bargain. Nay, nay, God Almighty will never have the heart to burn us two for such a trifle. Why, 'tis no more than cheating a froward child taking 's physic."

Mrs. Gaunt got into her carriage and went home, thinking all the way. What she had heard filled her with feelings strangely but sweetly composed of veneration and pity. In that Leonard was a great orator and a high-minded priest, she revered him; in that he was solitary and sad, she pitied him; in that he wanted common sense, she felt like a mother, and must take him under her wing. All true women love to protect; perhaps it is a part of the great maternal element; but to protect a man, and yet look up to him, this is delicious.

Leonard, in truth, was one of those high-strung men who pay for their periods of religious rapture by hours of melancholy. This oscillation of the spirits in extraordinary men appears to be more or less a law of nature; and this the widow Gough was not aware of.

The very next Sunday, while he was preaching, she

and Mrs. Gaunt's gardener were filling his bow window with flower-pots, the flowers in full bloom and leaf. The said window was large, and had a broad sill outside, and, inside, one of the old-fashioned high window-seats that follow the shape of the window. Mrs. Gaunt, who did nothing by halves, sent up a cartload of flower-pots, and Betty and the gardener arranged at least eighty of them, small and great, inside and outside the window.

When Leonard returned from preaching, Betty was at the door to watch. He came past the window with his hands on his breast, and his eyes on the ground, and never saw the flowers in his own window. Betty was disgusted. However, she followed him stealthily as he went to his room, and she heard a profound "Ah!" burst from him.

She bustled in and found him standing in a rapture, with the blood mantling in his pale cheeks, and his dark eyes glowing.

"Now blessed be the heart that hath conceived this thing, and the hand that hath done it," said he. "My poor room it is a bower of roses, all beauty and fragrance." And he sat down inhaling them, and looking at them; and a dreamy, tender complacency crept over his heart, and softened his noble features exquisitely.

Widow Gough, red with gratified pride, stood watching him, and admiring him; but, indeed, she often admired him, though she had got into a way of decrying him.

But at last she lost patience at his want of curiosity; that being a defect she was free from herself. "Ye don't ask me who sent them," said she, reproachfully.

"Nay, nay," said he; "prithee do not tell me: let me divine."

"Divine, then," said Betty roughly. "Which I suppose you means 'guess.'"

"Nay, but let me be quiet awhile," said he implor-

ingly; "let me sit down and fancy that I am a holy man, and some angel hath turned my cave into a paradise."

"No more an angel than I am," said the practical widow. "But, now I think on't, y'are not to know who 'twas. Them as sent them they bade me hold my tongue."

This was not true; but Betty, being herself given to unwise revelations and superfluous secrecy, chose suddenly to assume that this business was to be clandestine.

The priest turned his eye inwards, and meditated. "I see who it is," said he, with an air of absolute conviction. "It must be the lady who comes always when I preach, and her face like none other; it beams with divine intelligence. I will make her all the return we poor priests can make to our benefactors. I will pray for her soul here among the flowers God has made, and she has given His servant to glorify his dwelling. My daughter, you may retire."

This last with surprising, gentle dignity: so Betty went off rather abashed, and avenged herself by adulterating the holy man's innutritious food with Mrs. Gaunt's good gravy, while he prayed fervently for her eternal weal among the flowers she had given him.

Now Mrs. Gaunt, after eight years of married life, was too sensible and dignified a woman to make a romantic mystery out of nothing. She concealed the gravy, because there secrecy was necessary; but she never dreamed of hiding that she had sent her spiritual adviser a load of flowers. She did not tell her neighbors, for she was not ostentatious; but she told her husband, who grunted, but did not object.

But Betty's nonsense lent an air of romance and mystery that was well adapted to captivate the imagination of a young, ardent, and solitary spirit like Leonard.

He would have called on the lady he suspected, and

thanked her for her kindness; but this he feared would be unwelcome, since she chose to be his unknown benefactress. It would be ill-taste in him to tell her he had found her out: it might offend her sensibility, and then she would draw in.

He kept his gratitude, therefore, to himself, and did not cool it by utterance. He often sat among the flowers, in a sweet reverie, enjoying their color and fragrance; and sometimes he would shut his eyes, and call up the angelical face with great celestial upturned orbs, and fancy it among her own flowers, and the queen of them all.

These day-dreams did not, at that time, interfere with his religious duties. They only took the place of those occasional hours, when, partly by the reaction consequent on great religious fervor, partly through exhaustion of the body weakened by fasts, partly by the natural delicacy of his fibre, and the tenderness of his disposition, his soul used to be sad.

By and by these languid hours, sad no longer, became sweet and dear to him. He had something so interesting to think of, to dream about. He had a Madonna that cared for him in secret.

She was human; but good, beautiful, and wise. She came to his sermons, and understood every word.

"And she knows me better than I know myself," said he. "Since I had these flowers from her hand, I am another man."

One day he came into his room, and found two watering-pots there. One was large, and had a rose to it; the other, small, and with a plain spout.

"Ah!" said he, and colored with delight. He called Betty, and asked her who had brought them.

"How should I know?" said she roughly. "I dare say they dropped from heaven. See, there is a cross painted on 'em in gold letters."

"And so there is!" said Leonard, and crossed himself.

"That means nobody is to use them but you, I trow," said Betty rather crossly.

The priest's cheek colored high. "I will use them this instant," said he. "I will revive my drooping children, as they have revived me." And he caught up a watering-pot with ardor.

"What! with the sun hot upon 'em?" screamed Betty. "Well, saving your presence, you *are* a simple man."

"Why, good Betty, 'tis the sun that makes them faint," objected the priest timidly, and with the utmost humility of manner, though Betty's tone would have irritated a smaller mind.

"Well, well," said she, softening; "but ye see it never rains with a hot sun, and the flowers they know that, and look to be watered after Nature, or else they take it amiss. You, and all your sort, sir, you think to be stronger than nature. You do fast and pray all day, and won't look a woman in the face, like other men; and now you wants to water the very flowers at noon."

"Betty," said Leonard smiling, "I yield to thy superior wisdom, and I will water them at morn and eve. In truth, we have all much to learn. Let us try and teach one another as kindly as we can."

"I wish you'd teach me to be as humble as you be," blurted out Betty, with something very like a sob; "and more respectful to my betters," added she angrily.

Watering the flowers she had given him became a solace and a delight to the solitary priest: he always watered them with his own hands, and felt quite paternal over them.

One evening Mrs. Gaunt rode by with Griffith, and saw him watering them. His tall figure, graceful, though inclined to stoop, bent over them with feminine delicacy,

and the simple act, which would have been nothing in vulgar hands, seemed to Mrs. Gaunt so earnest, tender, and delicate in him, that her eyes filled, and she murmured, "Poor Brother Leonard!"

"Why, what's wrong with him now?" asked Griffith, a little peevishly.

"That was him watering his flowers."

"Oh, is that all?" said Griffith carelessly.

Leonard said to himself, "I go too little abroad among my people." He made a little round, and it ended in Hernshaw Castle.

Mrs. Gaunt was out.

He looked disappointed; so the servant suggested that perhaps she was in the Dame's Haunt: he pointed to the grove.

Leonard followed his direction, and soon found himself, for the first time, in that sombre, solemn retreat.

It was a hot summer day, and the grove was delicious. It was also a place well suited to the imaginative and religious mind of the Italian.

He walked slowly to and fro, in religious meditation. Indeed, he had nearly thought out his next sermon, when his meditative eye happened to fall on a terrestrial object that startled and thrilled him. Yet it was only a lady's glove. It lay at the foot of a rude wooden seat beneath a gigantic pine.

He stooped and picked it up. He opened the little fingers, and called up in fancy the white and tapering hand that glove could fit. He laid the glove softly on his own palm, and eyed it with dreamy tenderness. "So this is the hand that hath solaced my loneliness," said he: "a hand fair as that angelical face, and sweet as the kind heart that doeth good by stealth."

Then, forgetting for a moment, as lofty spirits will, the difference between *meum* and *tuum*, he put the little

glove in his bosom, and paced thoughtfully home through the woods that were separated from the grove only by one meadow; and so he missed the owner of the glove, for she had returned home while he was meditating in her favorite haunt.

Leonard, amongst his other accomplishments, could draw and paint with no mean skill. In one of those hours that used to be of melancholy, but now were hours of dreamy complacency, he took out his pencils, and endeavored to sketch the inspired face that he had learned to preach to, and now to dwell on with gratitude.

Clearly as he saw it before him, he could not reproduce it to his own satisfaction.

After many failures, he got very near the mark; yet still something was wanting.

Then, as a last resource, he actually took his sketch to church with him, and, in preaching, made certain pauses, and, with a very few touches, perfected the likeness; then, on his return home, threw himself on his knees, and prayed forgiveness of God with many sighs and tears, and hid the sacrilegious drawing out of his own sight.

Two days after, he was at work coloring it; and the hours flew by like minutes, as he laid the mellow, melting tints on with infinite care and delicacy. *Labor ipse voluptas.*

Mrs. Gaunt heard Leonard had called on her in person. She was pleased at that, and it encouraged her to carry out her whole design.

Accordingly, one afternoon when she knew Leonard would be at vespers, she sent on a loaded pony-cart, and followed it on horseback.

Then it was all hurry-scurry with Betty and her, to get their dark deeds done before their victim's return.

These good creatures set the mirror opposite the flowery window, and so made the room a very bower. They fixed a magnificent crucifix of ivory and gold over the mantel-piece, and they took away his hassock of rushes and substituted a prie-dieu of rich crimson velvet. All that remained was to put their blue cover, with its golden cross, on the table. To do this, however, they had to remove the priest's papers and things; they were covered with a baize cloth. Mrs. Gaunt felt them under it.

"But perhaps he will be angry if we move his papers," said she.

"Not he," said Betty. "He has no secrets from God or man."

"Well, *I* won't take it on me," said Mrs. Gaunt, merrily. "I leave that to you." And she turned her back and settled the mirror, officiously, leaving all the other responsibilities to Betty.

The sturdy widow laughed at her scruple, and whipped off the cloth without ceremony. But soon her laugh stopped mighty short, and she uttered an exclamation.

"What is the matter?" said Mrs. Gaunt, turning her head sharply round.

"A wench's glove, as I'm a living sinner," groaned Betty.

A poor little glove lay on the table; and both women eyed it like basilisks a moment. Then Betty pounced on it, and examined it with the fierce keenness of her sex in such conjunctures, searching for a name or a clew.

Owing to this rapidity, Mrs. Gaunt, who stood at some distance, had not time to observe the button on the glove, or she would have recognized her own property.

"He have had a hussy with him unbeknown," said Betty, "and she have left her glove. 'Tis easy to get in by the window and out again. Only let me catch her. I'll tear her eyes out, and give him my mind. I'll have no young hussies creeping in an' out where I be."

Thus spoke the simple woman, venting her coarse domestic jealousy.

The gentlewoman said nothing, but a strange feeling traversed her heart for the first time in her life.

It was a little chill, it was a little ache, it was a little sense of sickness; none of these violent, yet all distinct. And all about what? After this curious, novel spasm at the heart, she began to be ashamed of herself for having had such a feeling.

Betty held her out the glove; and then she recognized it, and turned as red as fire.

"You know whose 'tis?" said Betty, keenly.

Mrs. Gaunt was on her guard in a moment. "Why, Betty," said she, "for shame! 'tis some penitent hath left her glove after confession. Would you belie a good man for that? Oh, fie!"

"Humph!" said Betty, doubtfully. "Then why keep it under cover? Now you can read, dame; let us see if there isn't a letter or so writ by the hand as owns this very glove."

Mrs. Gaunt declined, with cold dignity, to pry into Brother Leonard's manuscripts.

Her eye, however, darted sidelong at them, and told another tale; and, if she had been there alone, perhaps the daughter of Eve would have predominated.

Betty, inflamed by the glove, rummaged the papers in search of female handwriting. She could tell that from a man's, though she could not read either.

But there is a handwriting that the most ignorant

can read at sight; and so Betty's researches were not in vain; hidden under several sheets of paper, she found a picture. She gave but one glance at it, and screamed out — "There, didn't I tell you? Here she is! the brazen, red-haired — LAWK A DAISY! WHY, 'TIS YOURSELF!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"ME!" cried Mrs. Gaunt, in amazement; then she ran to the picture, and at sight of it every other sentiment gave way for a moment to gratified vanity. "Nay," said she, beaming and blushing, "I was never half so beautiful. What heavenly eyes!"

"The fellows to 'em be in your own head, dame, this moment."

"Seeing is believing," said Mrs. Gaunt gayly, and in a moment she was at the priest's mirror, and inspected her eyes minutely, cocking her head this way and that. She ended by shaking it, and saying, "Nay. He has flattered them prodigiously."

"Not a jot," said Betty. "If you could see yourself in chapel, you do turn 'em up, just so, and the white shows all round." Then she tapped the picture with her finger: "Oh, them eyes! they were never made for the good of his soul; poor simple man."

Betty said this with sudden gravity; and now Mrs. Gaunt began to feel very awkward. "Mr. Gaunt would give fifty pounds for this," said she, to gain time; and, while she uttered that sentence, she whipped on her armor.

"I'll tell you what I think," said she, calmly; "he wished to paint a Madonna; and he must take some woman's face to aid his fancy. All the painters are driven to that. So he just took the best that came to hand, and that is not saying much, for this is a rare ill-favored parish; and he has made an angel of her, a very angel. There, hide me away again, or I shall long for

me — to show to my husband. I must be going; I wouldn't be caught here *now* for a pension."

"Well, if ye must," said Betty; "but when will ye come again?" (She hadn't got the petticoat yet.)

"Humph!" said Mrs. Gaunt, "I have done all I can for him; and perhaps more than I ought. But there's nothing to hinder you from coming to me. I'll be as good as my word; and I have an old paduasoy, besides; you can do something with it perhaps."

"You are very good, dame," said Betty, courtesying.

Mrs. Gaunt then hurried away, and Betty looked after her very expressively, and shook her head. She had a female instinct that mischief was brewing.

Mrs. Gaunt went home in a reverie.

At the gate she found her husband, and asked him to take a turn in the garden with her.

He complied; and she intended to tell him a portion, at least, of what had occurred. She began timidly, after this fashion: "My dear, Brother Leonard is *so* grateful for your flowers," and then hesitated.

"I'm sure he is very welcome," said Griffith. "Why doesn't he sup with us and be sociable, as Father Francis used? Invite him; let him know he will be welcome."

Mrs. Gaunt blushed; and objected, "He never calls on us."

"Well, well, every man to his taste," said Griffith, indifferently, and proceeded to talk to her about his farm, and a sorrel mare with a white mane and tail, that he had seen, and thought it would suit her.

She humored him, and affected a great interest in all this, and had not the courage to force the other topic on.

Next Sunday morning, after a very silent breakfast, she burst out, almost violently, "Griffith, I shall go to the parish church with you, and then we will dine together afterwards."

"You don't mean it, Kate?" said he, delighted.

"Ay, but I do. Although you refused to go to chapel with me."

They went to church together, and Mrs. Gaunt's appearance there created no small sensation. She was conscious of that, but hid it, and conducted herself admirably. Her mind seemed entirely given to the service, and to a dull sermon that followed.

But at dinner she broke out, "Well, give me your church for a sleeping draught. You all slumbered, more or less; those that survived the drowsy, droning prayers, sank under the dry, dull, dreary discourse. You snored, for one."

"No, I hope not, my dear."

"You did, then, as loud as your bass fiddle."

"And you sat there and let me!" said Griffith reproachfully.

"To be sure I did. I was too good a wife, and too good a Christian, to wake you. Sleep is good for the body, and twaddle is not good for the soul. I'd have slept too, if I could; but, with me going to chapel, I'm not used to sleep at that time o' day. You can't sleep, and Brother Leonard speaking."

In the afternoon came Mrs. Gough all in her best. Mrs. Gaunt had her into the bedroom, and gave her the promised petticoat, and the old Peau de soie gown, and then, as ladies will, when their hand is once in, added first one thing, then another, till there was quite a large bundle.

"But how is it you are here so soon?" asked Mrs. Gaunt.

"Oh, we had next to no sermon to-day. He couldn't make no hand of it; dawdled on a bit; then gave us his blessing, and bundled us out."

"Then I've lost nothing," said Mrs. Gaunt.

"Not you. Well, I don't know. Mayhap if you had been there he'd have preached his best. But la! we weren't worth it."

At this conjecture Mrs. Gaunt's face burned, but she said nothing: only she cut the interview short, and dismissed Betty with her bundle.

As Betty crossed the landing, Mrs. Gaunt's new lady's-maid, Caroline Ryder, stepped accidentally, on purpose, out of an adjoining room, in which she had been lurking, and lifted her black brows in affected surprise. "What, are you going to strip the house, my woman?" said she quietly.

Betty put down the bundle, and set her arms akimbo. "There is none on't stolen, any way," said she.

Caroline's black eyes flashed fire at this, and her cheek lost color; but she parried the innuendo skilfully.

"Taking my perquisites on the sly, that is not so very far from stealing."

"Oh, there's plenty left for you, my fine lady. Besides, you don't want *her;* you can set your cap at the master, they say. I'm too old for that, and too honest into the bargain."

"Too ill-favored, you mean, ye old harridan," said Ryder contemptuously.

But, for reasons hereafter to be dealt with, Betty's thrust went home; and the pair were mortal enemies from that hour.

Mrs. Gaunt came down from her room discomposed; from that she became restless and irritable: so much so, indeed, that at last Mr. Gaunt told her, good-humoredly enough, if going to church made her ill (meaning peevish), she had better go to chapel. "You are right," said she, "and so I will."

The next Sunday she was at her post in good time.

The preacher cast an anxious glance around to see if

she was there. Her quick eye saw that glance, and it gave her a demure pleasure.

This day he was more eloquent than ever; and he delivered a beautiful passage concerning those who do good in secret. In uttering these eloquent sentences, his cheek glowed, and he could not deny himself the pleasure of looking down at the lovely face that was turned up to him. Probably his look was more expressive than he intended: the celestial eyes sank under it, and were abashed, and the fair cheek burned; and then so did Leonard's at that.

Then, subtly yet effectually, did those two minds communicate in a crowd, that never noticed nor suspected the delicate interchange of sentiment that was going on under their very eyes.

In a general way compliments did not seduce Mrs. Gaunt: she was well used to them, for one thing. But to be praised in that sacred edifice, and from the pulpit, and by such an orator as Leonard, and to be praised in words so sacred and beautiful, that the ears around her drank them with delight, all this made her heart beat, and filled her with soft and sweet complacency.

And then to be thanked in public, yet, as it were, clandestinely, this gratified the furtive tendency of women.

There was no irritability this afternoon, but a gentle radiance that diffused itself on all around, and made the whole household happy, especially Griffith, whose pipe she filled, for once, with her own white hand, and talked dogs, horses, calves, hinds, cows, politics, markets, hay, to please him, and seemed interested in them all.

But the next day she changed: ill at ease, and out of spirits, and could settle to nothing.

It was very hot, for one thing: and, altogether, a sort of lassitude and distaste for everything overpowered her,

and she retired into the grove, and sat languidly on a seat with half-closed eyes.

But her meditations were no longer so calm and speculative as heretofore. She found her mind constantly recurring to one person, and, above all, to the discovery she had made of her portrait in his possession. She had turned it off to Betty Gough; but here, in her calm solitude and umbrageous twilight, her mind crept out of its cave, like wild and timid things at dusk, and whispered to her heart that Leonard perhaps admired her more than was safe or prudent.

Then this alarmed her, yet caused her a secret complacency: and that, her furtive satisfaction, alarmed her still more.

Now, while she sat thus absorbed, she heard a gentle footstep coming near. She looked up, and there was Leonard close to her, standing meekly with his arms crossed upon his bosom.

His being there so pat upon her thoughts, scared her out of her habitual self-command. She started up with a faint cry, and stood panting as if about to fly, with her beautiful eyes turned large upon him.

He put forth a deprecating hand, and soothed her. "Forgive me, madam," said he; "I have unawares intruded on your privacy: I will retire."

"Nay," said she falteringly, "you are welcome. But no one comes here, so I was startled." Then, recovering herself, "Excuse my ill manners. 'Tis so strange you should come to me here, of all places."

"Nay, my daughter," said the priest, "not so very strange: contemplative minds love such places. Calling one day to see you, I found this sweet and solemn grove: the like I never saw in England; and to-day I returned in hopes to profit by it. Do but look around at these tall columns: how calm, how reverend! 'Tis God's own temple not built with hands."

"Indeed it is," said Mrs. Gaunt earnestly. Then, like a woman as she was, "So you came to see my trees, not me."

Leonard blushed. "I did not design to return without paying my respects to her who owns this temple, and is worthy of it; nay, I beg you not to think me ungrateful."

His humility, and gentle but earnest voice, made Mrs. Gaunt ashamed of her petulance. She smiled sweetly, and looked pleased. However, ere long she attacked him again. "Father Francis used to visit us often," said she. "He made friends with my husband, too. And I never lacked an adviser while he was here."

Leonard looked so confused at this second reproach that Mrs. Gaunt regretted having uttered it. Then he said humbly that Francis was a secular priest, whereas he was convent-bred. He added, that by his years and experience Francis was better fitted to advise persons of her age and sex, in matters secular, than he was. He concluded timidly that he was ready, nevertheless, to try and advise her, but could not, in such matters, assume the authority that belongs to age and knowledge of the world.

"Nay, nay," said she earnestly, "guide and direct my soul, and I am content."

He said yes; that was his duty and his right.

Then, after a certain hesitation, which at once let her know what was coming, he began to thank her, with infinite grace and sweetness, for her kindness to him.

She looked him full in the face, and said she was not aware of any kindness she had shown him worth speaking of.

"That but shows," said he, "how natural it is to you to do acts of goodness. My poor room is a very bower now, and I am happy in it. I used to feel very sad there at times; but your hand has cured me."

Mrs. Gaunt colored beautifully. "You make me ashamed," said she. "Things are come to a pass indeed if a lady may not send a few flowers and things to her spiritual father without being — thanked for it. And, oh, sir, what are earthly flowers compared with those blossoms of the soul you have shed so liberally over us? Our immortal parts were all asleep when you came here, and wakened them by the fire of your words. Eloquence! 'twas a thing I had read of, but never heard, nor thought to hear. Methought the orators and poets of the Church were all in their graves this thousand years, and she must go all the way to heaven, that would hear the soul's true music. But I know better now."

Leonard colored high with pleasure. "Such praise from you is too sweet," he muttered. "I must not court it. The heart is full of vanity." And he deprecated further eulogy, by a movement of the hand extremely refined and, in fact, rather feminine.

Deferring to his wish, Mrs. Gaunt glided to other matters, and was naturally led to speak of the prospects of their Church, and the possibility of reconverting these islands. This had been the dream of her young heart; but marriage and maternity, and the universal coldness with which the subject had been received, had chilled her so, that of late years she had almost ceased to speak of it. Even Leonard, on a former occasion, had listened coldly to her; but now his heart was open to her. He was, in fact, quite as enthusiastic on this point as ever she had been; and then he had digested his aspirations into clearer forms. Not only had he resolved that Great Britain must be reconverted, but had planned the way to do it. His cheek glowed, his eyes gleamed, and he poured out his hopes and his plans before her with an eloquence that few mortals could have resisted.

As for this, his hearer, she was quite carried away by

it. She joined herself to his plans on the spot; she begged, with tears in her eyes, to be permitted to support him in this great cause. She devoted to it her substance, her influence, and every gift that God had given her: the hours passed like minutes in this high converse; and, when the tinkling of the little bell at a distance summoned him to vespers, he left her with a gentle regret he scarcely tried to conceal, and she went slowly in like one in a dream, and the world seemed dead to her forever.

Nevertheless, when Mrs. Ryder, combing out her long hair, gave one inadvertent tug, the fair enthusiast came back to earth, and asked her, rather sharply, who her head was running on.

Ryder, a very handsome young woman, with fine black eyes, made no reply, but only drew her breath audibly hard.

I do not very much wonder at that, nor at my having to answer that question for Mrs. Ryder. For her head was at that moment running, like any other woman's, on the man she was in love with.

And the man she was in love with was the husband of the lady whose hair she was combing, and who put her that curious question — plump.

CHAPTER XVIII.

This Caroline Ryder was a character almost impossible to present so as to enable the reader to recognize her should she cross his path: so great was the contradiction between what she was, and what she seemed; and so perfect was the imitation.

She looked a respectable young spinster, with a grace of manner beyond her station, and a decency and propriety of demeanor that inspired respect.

She was a married woman, separated from her husband by mutual consent: and she had had many lovers, each of whom she had loved ardently — for a little while. She was a woman that brought to bear upon foolish, culpable loves, a mental power that would have adorned the woolsack.

The moment prudence or waning inclination made it advisable to break with the reigning favorite, she set to work to cool him down by deliberate coldness, sullenness, insolence; and generally succeeded. But, if he was incurable, she never hesitated as to her course; she smiled again on him and looked out for another place: being an invaluable servant, she got one directly; and was off to fresh pastures.

A female rake; but with the air of a very prude.

Still the decency and propriety of her demeanor were not all hypocrisy, but half hypocrisy, and half inborn and instinctive good taste and good sense.

As dangerous a creature to herself and others as ever tied on a bonnet.

On her arrival at Hernshaw Castle she cast her eyes

round to see what there was to fall in love with, and observed the gamekeeper, Tom Leicester. She gave him a smile or two that won his heart, but there she stopped; for soon the ruddy cheek, brown eyes, manly proportions, and square shoulders of her master attracted this connoisseur in masculine beauty. And then his manner was so genial and hearty, with a smile for everybody. Mrs. Ryder eyed him demurely day by day, and often opened a window slyly to watch him unseen.

From that she got to throwing herself in his way; and this with such art that he never discovered it, though he fell in with her about the house six times as often as he met his wife or any other inmate.

She had already studied his character, and, whether she arranged to meet him full, or to cross him, it was always with a courtesy and a sunshiny smile; he smiled on her in his turn, and felt a certain pleasure at sight of her; for he loved to see people bright and cheerful about him.

Then she did, of her own accord, what no other master on earth would have persuaded her to do: looked over his linen; sewed on buttons for him; and sometimes the artful jade deliberately cut a button off a clean shirt, and then came to him and sewed it on during wear. This brought about a contact none knew better than she how to manage to a man's undoing. The eyelashes lowered over her work deprecating, yet inviting, — the twenty stitches, when six would have done, — the one coy glance at leaving. All this soft witchcraft beset Griffith Gaunt, and told on him; but not as yet in the way his inamorata intended. "Kate," said he one day, "that girl of yours is worth her weight in gold."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Gaunt, frigidly; "I have not discovered it."

When Caroline found that her master was single

hearted, and loved his wife too well to look elsewhere, instead of hating him, she began to love him more seriously, and to hate his wife, that haughty beauty who took such a husband as a matter of course, and held him tight without troubling her head.

It was a coarse age, and in that very county more than one wife had suffered jealous agony from her own domestic. But here the parts were inverted: the lady was at her ease; the servant paid a bitter penalty for her folly. She was now passionately in love, and had to do menial offices for her rival every hour of the day: she must sit with Mrs. Gaunt, and make her dresses, and consult with her how to set off her hateful beauty to the best advantage. She had to dress her, and look daggers at her satin skin and royal neck, and to sit behind her an hour at a time combing and brushing her long golden hair.

How she longed to tear a handful of it out, and then run away! Instead of that, her happy rival expected her to be as tender and coaxing with it as Madame de Maintenon was with the queen's of France.

Ryder called it "yellow stuff" down in the kitchen; that was one comfort: but a feeble one; the sun came in at the lady's window, and Ryder's shapely hand was overflowed, and her eyes offended, by waves of burnished gold: and one day Griffith came in and kissed it in her very hand. His lips felt nothing but his wife's glorious hair; but, by that exquisite sensibility which the heart can convey in a moment to the very finger-nails, Caroline's hand, beneath, felt the soft touch through her mistress's hair; and the enamoured hypocrite thrilled, and then sickened at her own folly.

For in her good sense could be overpowered, but never long blinded.

On the day in question she was thinking of Griffith,

as usual, and wondering whether he would always prefer yellow hair to black. This actually put her off her guard for once, and she gave the rival hair a little contemptuous tug: and the reader knows what followed.

Staggered by her mistress's question, Caroline made no reply, but only panted a little, and proceeded more carefully.

But, oh the struggle it cost her not to slap both Mrs. Gaunt's fair cheeks with the backs of the brushes! And what with this struggle, and the reprimand, and the past agitations, by and by the comb ceased, and the silence was broken by faint sobs.

Mrs. Gaunt turned calmly round and looked full at her hysterical handmaid.

"What is to do?" said she. "Is it because I chid you, child? Nay, you need not take that to heart; it is just my way: I can bear anything but my hair pulled." With this she rose and poured some drops of sal-volatile into water, and put it to her secret rival's lips: it was kindly done, but with that sort of half-contemptuous and thoroughly cold pity women are apt to show to women, and especially when one of them is mistress and the other is servant.

Still it cooled the extreme hatred Caroline had nursed, and gave her a little twinge, and awakened her intelligence. Now her intelligence was truly remarkable when not blinded by passion. She was a woman with one or two other masculine traits beside her roving heart. For instance, she could sit and think hard and practically for hours together: and on these occasions her thoughts were never dreamy and vague; it was no brown study, but good hard thinking. She would knit her coal-black brows, like Lord Thurlow himself, and realize the situation, and weigh the pros and cons with a steady judicial power rarely found in her sex: and, *nota bene*, when

once her mind had gone through this process, then she would act with almost monstrous resolution.

She now shut herself up in her own room for some hours and weighed the matter carefully.

The conclusion she arrived at was this: that, if she stayed at Hernshaw Castle, there would be mischief; and probably she herself would be the principal sufferer to the end of the chapter, as she was now.

She said to herself, "I shall go mad, or else expose myself, and be turned away with loss of character; and then what will become of me and my child? Better lose life or reason than character. I know what I have to go through; I have left a man ere now with my heart tugging at me to stay beside him. It is a terrible wrench: and then all seems dead for a long while without *him*. But the world goes on and takes you round with it; and by and by you find there are as good fish left in the sea as ever came out on't. I'll go, while I've sense enough left to see I must."

The very next day she came to Mrs. Gaunt and said she wished to leave. "Certainly," said Mrs. Gaunt, coldly. "May I ask the reason?"

"Oh, I have no complaint to make, ma'am, none whatever; but I am not happy here; and I wish to go when my month's up, or sooner, ma'am, if you could suit yourself."

Mrs. Gaunt considered a moment: then she said, "You came all the way from Gloucestershire to me: had you not better give the place a fair trial? I have had two or three good servants that felt uncomfortable at first; but they soon found out my ways, and stayed with me till they married. As for leaving me before your month, that is out of the question." To this Ryder said not a word, but merely vented a little sigh, half dogged, half submissive; and went cat-like about, arranging her

mistress's things with admirable precision and neatness. Mrs. Gaunt watched her, without seeming to do so, and observed that her discontent did not in the least affect her punctual discharge of her duties. Said Mrs. Gaunt to herself, "This servant is a treasure: she shall not go." And Ryder to herself, "Well, 'tis but for a month; and then no power shall keep me here."

CHAPTER XIX.

Not long after these events came the county ball. Griffith was there, but no Mrs. Gaunt. This excited surprise, and, among the gentlemen, disappointment. They asked Griffith if she was unwell; he thanked them dryly, she was very well; and that was all they could get out of him. But to the ladies he let out that she had given up balls, and, indeed, all reasonable pleasures. "She does nothing but fast, and pray, and visit the sick." He added, with rather a weak smile, "I see next to nothing of her." A minx stood by and put in her word. "You should catch the small-pox; then who knows? she might look in upon *you*."

Griffith laughed, but not heartily. In truth, Mrs. Gaunt's religious fervor knew no bounds. Absorbed in pious schemes and religious duties, she had little time, and much distaste, for frivolous society; invited none but the devout, and found polite excuses for not dining abroad. She sent her husband into the world alone, and laden with apologies. "My wife is turned saint. 'Tis a sin to dance, a sin to hunt, a sin to enjoy ourselves. We are here to fast and pray, and build schools, and go to church twice a day."

And so he went about publishing his household ill; but, to tell the truth, a secret satisfaction peeped through his lugubrious accents. An ugly saint is an unmixed calamity to jolly fellows; but to be lord and master, and possessor of a beautiful saint, was not without its piquant charm. His jealousy was dormant, not extinct; and Kate's piety tickled that foible, not wounded it. He

found himself the rival of heaven; and the successful rival; for, let her be ever so strict, ever so devout, she must give her husband many comforts she could not give to heaven.

This soft and piquant phase of the passion did not last long. All things are progressive.

Brother Leonard was director now as well as confessor; his visits became frequent; and Mrs. Gaunt often quoted his authority for her acts or her sentiments. So Griffith began to suspect that the change in his wife was entirely due to Leonard; and that with all her eloquence and fervor she was but a priest's echo. This galled him. To be sure, Leonard was only an ecclesiastic; but, if he had been a woman, Griffith was the man to wince. His wife to lean so on another: his wife to withdraw from the social pleasures she had hitherto shared with him; and all because another human creature disapproved them. He writhed in silence a while, and then remonstrated. He was met at first with ridicule: "Are you going to be jealous of my confessor?" and, on repeating the offence, with a kind but grave admonition, that silenced him for the time, but did not cure him, nor even convince him.

The facts were too strong: Kate was no longer to him the genial companion she had been; gone was the ready sympathy with which she had listened to all his little earthly concerns; and, as for his hay-making, he might as well talk about it to an iceberg as to the partner of his bosom.

He was genial by nature, and could not live without sympathy. He sought it in the parlor of the "Red Lion."

Mrs. Gaunt's high-bred nostrils told her where he haunted, and it caused her dismay. Woman-like, instead of opening her battery at once, she wore a gloomy and

displeased air, which a few months ago would have served her turn, and brought about an explanation at once; but Griffith took it for a stronger dose of religious sentiment, and trundled off to the "Red Lion" all the more.

So then at last she spoke her mind; and asked him how he could lower himself so, and afflict her.

"Oh!" said he, doggedly, "this house is too cold for me now. My mate is priest-rid. Plague on the knave that hath put coldness 'twixt thee and me."

Mrs. Gaunt froze visibly, and said no more at that time.

One bit of sunshine remained in the house and shone brighter than ever on its chilled master; shone through two black, seducing eyes.

Some three months before the date we have now reached, Caroline Ryder's two boxes were packed and corded ready to go next day. She had quietly persisted in her resolution to leave, and Mrs. Gaunt, though secretly angry, had been just and magnanimous enough to give her a good character.

Now female domestics are like the little birds: if that great hawk, their mistress, follows them about, it is a deadly grievance; but if she does not, they follow her about, and pester her with idle questions, and invite the beak and claws of petty tyranny and needless interference.

So the afternoon before she was to leave, Caroline Ryder came to her mistress's room on some imaginary business. She was not there. Ryder, forgetting that it did not matter a straw, proceeded to hunt her everywhere; and at last ran out with only her cap on to "the Dame's Haunt," and there she was; but not alone: she was walking up and down with Brother Leonard. Their backs were turned, and Ryder came up behind them. Leonard

was pacing gravely, with his head gently drooping as usual. Mrs. Gaunt was walking elastically, and discoursing with great fire and animation.

Ryder glided after, noiseless as a serpent, more bent on wondering and watching now than on overtaking; for inside the house her mistress showed none of this charming vivacity.

Presently the keen black eyes observed a "trifle light as air" that made them shine again.

She turned and wound herself amongst the trees, and disappeared. Soon after she was in her own room, a changed woman. With glowing cheeks, sparkling eyes, and nimble fingers, she uncorded her boxes, unpacked her things, and placed them neatly in the drawers.

What more had she seen than I have indicated?

Only this: Mrs. Gaunt, in the warmth of discourse, laid her hand lightly for a moment on the priest's elbow; that was nothing, she had laid the same hand on Ryder; for, in fact, it was a little womanly way she had, and a hand that settled like down. But this time, as she withdrew it again, that delicate hand seemed to speak; it did not leave Leonard's elbow all at once, it glided slowly away, first the palm, then the fingers, and so parted lingeringly.

The other woman saw this subtle touch of womanhood, coupled it with Mrs. Gaunt's vivacity and the air of happiness that seemed to inspire her whole eloquent person, and formed a harsh judgment on the spot, though she could not see the lady's face.

When Mrs. Gaunt came in she met her, and addressed her thus: "If you please, ma'am, have you any one coming in my place?"

Mrs. Gaunt looked her full in the face. "You know I have not," said she, haughtily.

"Then, if it is agreeable to you, ma'am, I will stay.

To be sure the place is dull; but I have got a good mistress — and" —

"That will do, Ryder: a servant has always her own reasons, and never tells *them* to her mistress. You can stay this time; but the next, you go; and once for all. I am not to be trifled with."

Ryder called up a look all submission, and retired with an obeisance. But, once out of sight, she threw off the mask and expanded with insolent triumph. "Yes, I have my own reasons," said she. "Keep you the priest, and I'll take the man."

From that hour Caroline Ryder watched her mistress like a lynx, and hovered about her master, and poisoned him slowly with vague insidious hints.

CHAPTER XX.

Brother Leonard, like many holy men, was vain. Not but what he had his gusts of humility and diffidence; only they blew over.

At first, as you may perhaps remember, he doubted his ability to replace Father Francis as Mrs. Gaunt's director; but after a slight disclaimer, he did replace him, and had no more misgivings as to his fitness. But his tolerance and good sense were by no means equal to his devotion and his persuasive powers; and so his advice in matters spiritual and secular somehow sowed the first seeds of conjugal coolness in Hernshaw Castle.

And now Ryder slyly insinuated into Griffith's ear that the mistress told the priest everything, and did nothing but by his advice. Thus the fire already kindled was fanned by an artful woman's breath.

Griffith began to hate Brother Leonard, and to show it so plainly and rudely that Leonard shrank from the encounter, and came less often, and stayed but a few minutes. Then Mrs. Gaunt remonstrated gently with Griffith, but received short sullen replies. Then, as the servile element of her sex was comparatively small in her, she turned bitter and cold, and avenged Leonard indirectly, but openly, with those terrible pins and needles a beloved woman has ever at command.

Then Griffith became moody, and downright unhappy, and went more and more to the "Red Lion," seeking comfort there now as well as company.

Mrs. Gaunt saw, and had fits of irritation, and fits of pity, and sore perplexity. She knew she had a good

husband; and, instead of taking him to heaven with her, she found that each step she made with Leonard's help, towards the angelic life, seemed somehow to be bad for Griffith's soul, and for his earthly happiness.

She blamed herself: she blamed Griffith; she blamed the Protestant heresy; she blamed everybody and everything — except Brother Leonard.

One Sunday afternoon Griffith sat on his own lawn, silently smoking his pipe. Mrs. Gaunt came to him, and saw an air of dejection on his genial face. Her heart yearned. She sat down beside him on the bench, and sighed; then he sighed too.

"My dear," said she, sweetly, "fetch out your viol da gambo, and we will sing a hymn or two together here this fine afternoon. We can praise God together, though we must pray apart; alas that it is so!"

"With all my heart," said Griffith. "Nay, I forgot; my viol da gambo is not here. 'Tis at the 'Red Lion.'"

"At the 'Red Lion!'" said she, bitterly. "What, do you sing there as well as drink? Oh, husband, how can you so bemean yourself?"

"What is a poor man to do, whose wife is priest-ridden, and got to be no company — except for angels?"

"I did not come here to quarrel," said she, coldly and sadly. Then they were both silent a minute. Then she got up and left him.

Brother Leonard, like many earnest men, was rather intolerant. He urged on Mrs. Gaunt that she had too many Protestants in her household: her cook and her nursemaid ought, at all events, to be Catholics. Mrs. Gaunt on this was quite ready to turn them both off, and that without disguise. But Leonard dissuaded her from so violent a measure. She had better take occasion to part with one of them, and by-and-by with the other.

The nursemaid was the first to go, and her place was

filled by a Roman Catholic. Then the cook received warning. But this did not pass off so quietly: Jane Bannister was a buxom hearty woman, well liked by her fellow-servants; her parents lived in the village, and she had been six years with the Gaunts, and her honest heart clung to them. She took to crying; used to burst out in the middle of her work, or while conversing with fitful cheerfulness on ordinary topics.

One day Griffith found her crying, and Ryder consoling her as carelessly and contemptuously as possible.

"Hey-day, lasses," said he; "what is your trouble?"

At this Jane's tears flowed in a stream, and Ryder made no reply, but waited.

At last, and not till the third or fourth time of asking, Jane blurted out that she had got the sack; such was her homely expression, dignified, however, by honest tears.

"What for?" asked Griffith, kindly.

"Nay, sir," sobbed Jane, "that is what I want to know. Our dame ne'er found a fault in me; and now she does pack me off like a dog. Me that have been here this six years, and got to feel at home. What will father say? He'll give me a hiding. For two pins I'd drown myself in the mere."

"Come, you must not blame the mistress," said the sly Ryder. "She is a good mistress as ever breathed: 'tis all the priest's doings. I'll tell you the truth, master, if you will pass me your word I shan't be sent away for it."

"I pledge you my word as a gentleman," said Griffith.

"Well, then, sir, Jane's fault is yours and mine. She is not a Papist; and that is why she is to go. How I come to know, I listened in the next room, and heard the priest tell our dame she must send away two of us, and have Catholics. The priest's word it is law in this

house; 'twas in March he gave the order; Harriet she went in May, and now poor Jane is to go — for walking to church behind *you*, sir. But there, Jane, I believe he would get our very master out of the house if he could; and then what would become of us all?"

Griffith turned black, and then ashy pale, under this venomous tongue, and went away without a word, looking dangerous.

Ryder looked after him, and her black eyes glittered with a kind of fiendish beauty.

Jane, having told her mind, now began to pluck up a little spirit. "Mrs. Ryder," said she, "I never thought to like you so well;" and, with that, gave her a great, hearty, smacking kiss; which Ryder, to judge by her countenance, relished, as epicures albumen. "I won't cry no more. After all, this house is no place for us that be women; 'tis a fine roost to be sure! where the hen she crows and the cock do but cluck."

Town-bred Ryder laughed at the rustic maid's simile; and, not to be outdone in metaphor, told her there were dogs that barked, and dogs that bit. "Our master is one of those that bite. I've done the priest's business. He is as like to get the sack as you are."

Griffith found his wife seated on the lawn reading. He gulped down his ire as well as he could; but nevertheless his voice trembled a little with suppressed passion.

"So Jane is turned off now," said he.

"I don't know about being turned off," replied Mrs. Gaunt, calmly; "but she leaves me next month, and Cicely Davis comes back."

"And Cicely Davis is a useless slut that cannot boil a potato fit to eat; but then she is a Papist, and poor Jenny is a Protestant, and can cook a dinner."

"My dear," said Mrs. Gaunt, "do not you trouble about the servants; leave them to me."

"And welcome; but this is not your doing, it is that Leonard's: and I cannot allow a Popish priest to turn off all my servants that are worth their salt. Come, Kate, you used to be a sensible woman, and a tender wife: now I ask you, is a young bachelor a fit person to govern a man's family?"

Mrs. Gaunt laughed in his face. "A young bachelor!" said she; "who ever heard of such a term applied to a priest: and a saint upon earth?"

"Why, he is not married, so he must be a bachelor; and I say again it is monstrous for a young bachelor to come between old married folk, and hear all their secrets, and have a finger in every pie, and set up to be master of my house, and order my wife to turn away my servants for going to church behind me. Why not turn *me* away too? Their fault is mine."

"Griffith, you are in a passion, and I begin to think you want to put me in one."

"Well, perhaps I am. Job's patience went at last, and mine has been sore tried this many a month. 'Twas bad enough when the man was only your confessor: you told him everything, and you don't tell me everything. He knew your very heart, better than I do, and that was a bitter thing for me to bear that love you and have no secrets from you. But every man who marries a Catholic must endure this; so I put a good face on it, though my heart was often sore; 'twas the price I had to pay for my pearl of womankind. But since he set up your governor as well, you are a changed woman; you shun company abroad, you freeze my friends at home. You have made the house so cold that I am fain to seek the 'Red Lion' for a smile or a kindly word: and now, to please this fanatical priest, you would turn away the best servants I have, and put useless, dirty slatterns in their place, that happen to be Papists. You did not use to be so uncharit-

able, nor so unreasonable. 'Tis the priest's doing. He is my secret, underhand enemy; I feel him undermining me, inch by inch, and I can bear it no longer. I must make a stand somewhere, and I may as well make it here; for Jenny is a good girl, and her folk live in the village, and she helps them. Think better of it, Kate, and let the poor wench stay, though she does go to church behind your husband."

"Griffith," said Mrs. Gaunt, "I might retort and say that you are a changed man; for to be sure you did never use to interfere between me and my maids. Are you sure some mischief-making woman is not advising *you?* But there, do not let us chafe one another, for you know we are hot-tempered both of us. Well, leave it for the present, my dear; prithee let me think it over till to-morrow, at all events, and try if I can satisfy you."

The jealous husband saw through this proposal directly. He turned purple. "That is to say, you must ask your priest first for leave to show your husband one grain of respect and affection, and not make him quite a cipher in his own house. No, Kate, no man who respects himself will let another man come between himself and the wife of his bosom. This business is between you and me; I will brook no interference in it; and I tell you plainly, if you turn this poor lass off to please this d——d priest, I'll turn the priest off to please her and her folk. They are as good as he is, any way."

The bitter contempt with which he spoke of Brother Leonard, and this astounding threat, imported a new and dangerous element into the discussion: it stung Mrs. Gaunt beyond bearing. She turned with flashing eyes upon Griffith.

"As good as he is? The scum of my kitchen! You will make me hate the mischief-making hussy. She shall pack out of my house to-morrow morning."

"Then I say that priest shall never darken my doors again."

"Then I say they are my doors, not yours; and that holy man shall brighten them whenever he will."

If to strike an adversary dumb is the tongue's triumph, Mrs. Gaunt was victorious: for Griffith gasped, but did not reply.

They faced each other, pale with fury; but no more words.

No: an ominous silence succeeded this lamentable answer, like the silence that follows a thunder-clap.

Griffith stood still awhile, benumbed as it were by the cruel stroke; then cast one speaking look of anguish and reproach upon her, drew himself haughtily up, and stalked away like a wounded lion.

Well said the ancients that anger is a short madness. When we reflect in cold blood on the things we have said in hot, how impossible they seem! how out of character with our real selves! And this is one of the recognized symptoms of mania.

There were few persons could compare with Mrs. Gaunt in native magnanimity; yet how ungenerous a stab had she given!

And had he gone on, she would have gone on; but when he turned silent at her bitter thrust, and stalked away from her, she came to herself almost directly.

She thought, "Good God! what have I said to him?"

And the flush of shame came to her cheek, and her eyes filled with tears.

He saw them not; he had gone away, wounded to the heart.

You see it was true. The house was hers; tied up as tight as wax. The very money (his own money) that had been spent on the place, had become hers by being

expended on real property; he could not reclaim it; he was her lodger; a dependant on her bounty.

During all the years they had lived together she had never once assumed the proprietor. On the contrary, she put him forward as the squire, and slipped quietly into the background. *Bene latuit.* But, lo! let a hand be put out to offend her saintly favorite, and that moment she could waken her husband from his dream, and put him down into his true legal position with a word. The matrimonial throne for him till he resisted her priest; and then, a stool at her feet, and his.

He was enraged as well as hurt; but being a true lover, his fury was levelled not at the woman who had hurt him. but at the man who stood out of sight and set her on.

By this time the reader knows his good qualities and his defects; superior to his wife in one or two things, he was by no means so thorough a gentleman as she was a lady. He had begun to make a party with his own servants against the common enemy; and, in his wrath, he now took another step, or rather a stride, in the same direction. As he hurried away to the public-house, white with ire, he met his gamekeeper coming in with a bucketful of fish fresh caught. "What have ye got there?" said Griffith roughly; not that he was angry with the man, but that his very skin was full of wrath, and it must exude. Mr. Leicester did not relish the tone, and replied bluntly and sulkily, "Pike for our Papists." The answer, though rude, did not altogether displease Griffith; it smacked of odium theologicum, a sentiment he was learning to understand. "Put 'em down, and listen to me, Thomas Leicester," said he. And his manner was now so impressive that Leicester put down the bucket with ludicrous expedition, and gaped at him.

"Now, my man, why do I keep you here?"

"To take care of your game, squire, I do suppose."

"What? when you are the worst gamekeeper in the county? How many poachers do you catch in the year? They have only to set one of their gang to treat you at the public-house on a moonshiny night, and the rest can have all my pheasants at roost while you are boozing and singing."

"Like my betters in the parlor," muttered Tom.

"But that is not all," continued Gaunt, pretending not to hear him. "You wire my rabbits, and sell them in the town. Don't go to deny it, for I've half a dozen to prove it." Mr. Leicester looked very uncomfortable. His master continued — "I have known it this ten months, yet you are none the worse for it. Now, why do I keep you here, that any other gentleman in my place would send to Carlisle jail on a justice's warrant?"

Mr. Leicester, who had thought his master blind, and was so suddenly undeceived, hung his head and snivelled out, "'Tis because you have a good heart, squire, and would not ruin a poor fellow for an odd rabbit or two."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Gaunt. "Speak your mind, for once, or else begone for a liar as well as a knave."

Thus appealed to, Leicester's gypsy eyes roved to and fro as if he were looking for some loophole to escape by; but at last he faced the situation. He said, with a touch of genuine feeling, "D——n the rabbits! I wish my hand had withered ere I touched one of them." But after this preface he sunk his voice to a whisper, and said, "I see what you are driving at, squire; and since there is nobody with us (he took off his cap) — why, sir, 'tis this here mole I am in debt to, no doubt."

Then the gentleman and his servant looked one another silently in the face, and what with their standing in the same attitude, and being both excited and earnest, the truth must be owned, a certain family likeness came out. Certainly their eyes were quite unlike. Leicester had his gypsy mother's: black, keen, and restless. Gaunt had his mother's: brown, calm, and steady. But the two men had the same stature, the same manly mould and square shoulders; and, though Leicester's cheek was brown as a berry, his forehead was singularly white for a man in his rank of life, and over his left temple, close to the roots of the hair, was an oblong mole as black as ink, that bore a close resemblance in appearance and position to his master's.

"Tom Leicester, I have been insulted."

"That won't pass, sir. Who is the man?"

"One that I cannot call out like a gentleman, and yet I must not lay on him with my cane, or I am like to get the sack, as well as my servants. 'Tis the Popish priest, lad; Brother Leonard, own brother to Old Nick; he has got our dame's ear, she cannot say him 'nay.' She is turning away all my people, and filling the house with Papists, to please him. And when I interfered, she as good as told me I should go next; and so I shall, I or else that priest."

This little piece of exaggeration fired Tom Leicester. "Say ye so, squire? then just you whisper a word in my ear, and George and I will lay that priest by the heels, and drag him through the horse-pond. He won't come here to trouble you after that, *I* know."

Gaunt's eyes flashed triumph. "A friend in need is a friend indeed," said he. "Ay, you are right, lad. There must be no broken bones, and no bloodshed; the horse-pond is the very thing: and if she discharges you for it, take no heed of her. You shall never leave Hernshaw

Castle for that good deed; or, if you do, I'll go with you; for the world it is wide, and I'll never live a servant in the house where I have been a master."

They then put their heads together and concerted the means by which the priest at his very next visit was to be decoyed into the neighborhood of the horse-pond.

And then they parted, and Griffith went to the "Red Lion." And a pair of black eyes that had slyly watched this singular interview from an upper window, withdrew quietly; and soon after, Tom Leicester found himself face to face with their owner, the sight of whom always made his heart beat a little faster.

Caroline Ryder had been rather cold to him of late; it was, therefore, a charming surprise when she met him, all wreathed in smiles, and, drawing him apart, began to treat him like a bosom friend, and tell him what had passed between the master and her and Jane. Confidence begets confidence; and so Tom told her in turn that the squire and the dame had come to words over it. "However," said he, "'tis all the priest's fault; but bide awhile, all of ye."

With this mysterious hint he meant to close his revelations. But Ryder intended nothing of the kind. Her keen eye had read the looks and gestures of Gaunt and Leicester, and these had shown her that something very strange and serious was going on. She had come out expressly to learn what it was, and Tom was no match for her arts. She so smiled on him, and agreed with him, and led him, and drew him, and pumped him, that she got it all out of him on a promise of secrecy. She then entered into it with spirit, and being what they called a scholar, undertook to write a paper for Tom and his helper to pin on the priest's back. No sooner said than done. She left him, and speedily returned with the

following document written out in large and somewhat straggling letters: —

"Honest Folk, behold a
Mischievous Priest, which
For causing of strife
'Twixt man and wyfe
Hath made acquaintaunce
With Squire's horse-pond."

And so a female conspirator was added to the plot.

Mrs. Gaunt co-operated too, but, need I say, unconsciously.

She was unhappy, and full of regret at what she had said. She took herself severely to task and drew a very unfavorable comparison between herself and Brother Leonard. "How ill," she thought, "am I fitted to carry out that meek saint's views. See what my ungoverned temper has done." So then, having made so great a mistake, she thought the best thing she could do was to seek advice of Leonard at once. She was not without hopes he would tell her to postpone the projected change in her household, and so soothe her offended husband directly.

She wrote a line requesting Leonard to call on her as soon as possible, and advise her in a great difficulty; and she gave this note to Ryder, and told her to send the groom off with it at once.

Ryder squeezed the letter, and peered into it, and gathered its nature before she gave it to the groom to take to Leonard.

When he was gone she went and told Tom Leicester, and he chuckled, and made his preparations accordingly.

Then she retired to her own room and went through a certain process I have indicated before as one of her habits; knitted her great black brows, and pondered the

whole situation with a mental power that was worthy of a nobler sphere and higher materials.

Her practical reverie, so to speak, continued until she was rung for to dress her mistress for dinner.

Griffith was so upset, so agitated and restless, he could not stay long in any one place, not even in the "Red Lion." So he came home to dinner though he had mighty little appetite for it. And this led to another little conjugal scene.

Mrs. Gaunt mounted the great oak staircase to dress for dinner, languidly, as ladies are apt to do, when reflection and regret come after excitement.

Presently she heard a quick foot behind her; she knew it directly for her husband's, and her heart yearned. She did not stop nor turn her head; womanly pride withheld her from direct submission; but womanly tenderness and tact opened a way to reconciliation. She drew softly aside, almost to the wall, and went slower; and her hand, her sidelong drooping head, and her whole eloquent person, whispered plainly enough, "If somebody would like to make friends, here is the door open."

Griffith saw, but was too deeply wounded; he passed her without stopping (the staircase was eight feet broad).

But as he passed he looked at her and sighed, for he saw she was sorry.

She heard, and sighed too. Poor things, they had lived so happy together for years.

He went on.

Her pride bent. "Griffith!" said she, very timidly. He turned and stopped at that.

"Sweetheart," she murmured, "I was to blame. I was ungenerous. I forgot myself. Let me recall my words. You know they did not come from my heart."

"You need not tell me that," said Griffith, doggedly. "I have no quarrel with you, and never will. You but

do what you are bidden, and say what you are bidden. I take the wound from you as best I may; the man that set you on, 'tis him I'll be revenged on."

"Alas! that you will think so," said she. "Believe me, dearest, that holy man would be the first to rebuke me for rebelling against my husband and flouting him. Oh, how *could* I say such things? I thank you, and love you dearly for being so blind to my faults; but I must not abuse your blindness. Father Leonard will put me to penance for the fault you forgive. *He* will hear no excuses. Prithee, now, be more just to that good man."

Griffith listened quietly, with a cold sneer upon his lip; and this was his reply: "Till that mischief-making villain came between you and me, you never gave me a bitter word: we were the happiest pair in Cumberland. But now what are we? And what shall we be in another year or two? — REVENGE!"

He had begun gravely enough, but suddenly burst into an ungovernable rage; and as he yelled out that furious word his face was convulsed and ugly to look at; very ugly.

Mrs. Gaunt started; she had not seen that vile expression in his face for many a year; but she knew it again.

"Ah!" he cried, "he has made me drink a bitter cup this many a day. But I'll force as bitter a one down his throat, and you shall see it done."

Mrs. Gaunt turned pale at this violent threat; but being a high-spirited woman, she stiffened and hid her apprehensions loftily. "Madman that you are," said she. "I throw away excuses on *jealousy*, and I waste reason upon frenzy. I'll say no more things to provoke you; but, to be sure, 'tis I that am offended now, and deeply too, as you will find."

"So be it," said Griffith, sullenly; then, grinding his teeth, "he shall pay for that too."

Then he went to his dressing-room, and she to her bedroom. Griffith hating Leonard, and Kate deeply indignant with Griffith.

And, ere her blood could cool, she was subjected to the keen, cold scrutiny of another female, and that female a secret rival.

CHAPTER XXI.

Would you learn what men gain by admitting a member of the fair sex into their conspiracies? read the tragedy of *Venice Preserved;* and, by way of afterpiece, this little chapter.

Mrs. Gaunt sat pale and very silent, and Caroline Ryder stood behind, doing up her hair into a magnificent structure that added eight inches to the lady's height; and in this operation her own black hair and keen black eyes came close to the golden hair and deep blue eyes, now troubled, and made a picture striking by contrast.

As she was putting the finishing touches, she said quietly, "If you please, dame, I have somewhat to tell you."

Mrs. Gaunt sighed wearily, expecting some very minute communication.

"Well, dame, I dare say I am risking my place, but I can't help it."

"Another time, Ryder," said Mrs. Gaunt. "I am in no humor to be worried with my servants' squabbles."

"Nay, madam, 'tis not that at all; 'tis about Father Leonard. Sure you would not like him to be drawn through the horse-pond; and that is what they mean to do next time he comes here."

In saying these words, the jade contrived to be adjusting Mrs. Gaunt's dress. The lady's heart gave a leap, and the servant's cunning finger felt it, and then felt a shudder run all over that stately frame. But after that Mrs. Gaunt seemed to turn to steel. She distrusted

Ryder, she could not tell why; distrusted her, and was upon her guard.

"You must be mistaken," said she. "Who would dare to lay hands on a priest in my house?"

"Well, dame, you see they egg one another on. Don't ask me to betray my fellow-servants; but let us balk them. I don't deceive you, dame; if the good priest shows his face here, he will be thrown into the horse-pond, and sent home with a ticket pinned to his back. Them that is to do it are on the watch now, and have got their orders; and 'tis a burning shame. To be sure I am not a Catholic; but religion is religion, and a more heavenly face I never saw; and for it to be dragged through a filthy horse-pond!"

Mrs. Gaunt clutched her inspector's arm and turned pale. "The villains! the fiends!" she gasped. "Go ask your master to come to me this moment."

Ryder took a step or two, then stopped. "Alack, dame," said she, "that is not the way to do. You may be sure the others would not dare, if my master had not shown them his mind."

Mrs. Gaunt stopped her ears. "Don't tell me that *he* has ordered this impious, cruel, cowardly act. He is a lion: and this comes from the heart of cowardly curs. What is to be done, woman? tell me; for you are cooler than I am."

"Well, dame, if I were in your place, I'd just send him a line, and bid him stay away till the storm blows over."

"You are right. But who is to carry it? My own servants are traitors to me."

"I'll carry it myself."

"You shall. Put on your hat, and run through the wood; that is the shortest way."

She wrote a few lines on a large sheet of paper, for

note-paper there was none in those days, sealed it, and gave it to Ryder.

Ryder retired to put on her hat, and pry into the letter with greedy eyes.

It ran thus: —

DEAR FATHER AND FRIEND, — You must come hither no more at present. Ask the bearer why this is, for I am ashamed to put it on paper. Pray for them; for you can, but I cannot. Pray for me, too, bereft for a time of your counsels. I shall come and confess to you in a few days, when we are all cooler; but you shall honor *his* house no more. Obey *me* in this one thing, who shall obey you in all things else, and am

Your indignant and sorrowful daughter,

CATHERINE GAUNT.

"No more than that?" said Ryder. "Ay, she guessed as I should look."

She whipped on her hat, and went out.

Whom should she meet, or, I might say, run against, at the hall-door, but Father Leonard!

He had come at once in compliance with Mrs. Gaunt's request.

CHAPTER XXII.

Mrs. Ryder uttered a little scream of dismay. The priest smiled, and said sweetly, "Forgive me, mistress, I fear I startled you."

"Indeed you did, sir," said she. She looked furtively round, and saw Leicester and his underling on the watch.

Leicester, unaware of her treachery, made her a signal of intelligence.

She responded to it, to gain time.

It was a ticklish situation. Some would have lost their heads. Ryder was alarmed, but all the more able to defend her plans. Her first move, as usual with such women, was — a lie.

"Our dame is in the grove, sir," said she. "I am to bring you to her."

The priest bowed his head gravely, and moved towards the grove with downcast eyes. Ryder kept close to him for a few steps; then she ran to Leicester, and whispered, hastily, "Go you to the stable-gate. I'll bring him round that way. Hide now; he suspects."

"Ay, ay," said Leicester: and the confiding pair slipped away round a corner to wait for their victim.

Ryder hurried him into the grove, and as soon as she had got him out of hearing, told him the truth.

He turned pale; for these delicate organizations do not generally excel in courage.

Ryder pitied him, and something of womanly feeling began to mingle with her plans. "They shall not lay a finger on you, sir," said she. "I'll scratch and scream, and bring the whole parish out sooner; but the best way

is not to give them the chance. Please you follow me." And she hurried him through the grove, and then into an unfrequented path of the great wood.

When they were safe from pursuit she turned and looked at him. He was a good deal agitated; but the uppermost sentiment was gratitude. It soon found words, and, as usual, happy ones. He thanked her with dignity and tenderness for the service she had done him, and asked her if she was a Catholic.

"No," said she.

At that his countenance fell, but only for a moment. "Ah! would you were," he said, earnestly. He then added, sweetly, "To be sure I have all the more reason to be grateful to you."

"You are very welcome, reverend sir," said Ryder, graciously. "Religion is religion; and 'tis a barbarous thing that violence should be done to men of your cloth."

Having thus won his heart, the artful woman began at one and the same time to please and to probe him. "Sir," said she, "be of good heart; they have done you no harm, and themselves no good; my mistress will hate them for it, and love you all the more."

Father Leonard's pale cheek colored all over at these words, though he said nothing.

"Since they won't let you come to her, she will come to you."

"Do you think so?" said he, faintly.

"Nay, I am sure of it, sir. So would any woman. We still follow our hearts, and get our way by hook or by crook."

Again the priest colored either with pleasure or with shame, or with both; and the keen feminine eye perused him with microscopic power. She waited, to give him an opportunity of talking to her and laying bare his feelings; but he was either too delicate, too cautious, or too pure.

So then she suddenly affected to remember her mistress's letter. She produced it with an apology. He took it with unfeigned eagerness, and read it in silence; and, having read it, he stood patient, with the tears in his eyes. Ryder eyed him with much curiosity and a little pity. "Don't you take on for that," said she. "Why, she will be more at her ease when she visits you at your place than here; and she won't give you up, I promise."

The priest trembled, and Ryder saw it.

"But, my daughter," said he, "I am perplexed and grieved. It seems that I make mischief in your house: that is an ill office. I fear it is my duty to retire from this place altogether, rather than cause dissension between those whom the Church by holy sacrament hath bound together." So saying, he hung his head and sighed.

Ryder eyed him with a little pity, but more contempt.

"Why take other people's faults on your back?" said she. "My mistress is tied to a man she does not love; but that is not your fault; and he is jealous of you that never gave him cause. If I was a man he should not accuse me — for nothing; nor set his man on to drag me through a horse-pond — for nothing. I'd have the sweet as well as the bitter."

Father Leonard turned and looked at her with a face full of terror. Some beautiful, honeyed fiend seemed to be entering his heart and tempting it.

"Oh, hush! my daughter, hush!" he said; "what words are these for a virtuous woman to speak, and a priest to hear?"

"There, I have offended you by my blunt way," said the cajoling hussy, in soft and timid tones.

"Nay, not so; but oh, speak not so lightly of things that peril the immortal soul."

"Well, I have done," said Ryder. "You are out of danger now; so give you good-day."

He stopped her. "What, before I have thanked you for your goodness? Ah, Mistress Ryder, 'tis on these occasions a priest sins by longing for riches to reward his benefactors. I have nought to offer you but this ring. It was my mother's, my dear mother's."

He took it off his finger to give it her.

But the little bit of goodness that cleaves even to the heart of an intriguante revolted against her avarice.

"Nay, poor soul, I'll not take it," said she, and put her hands before her eyes not to see it, for she knew she could not look at it long and spare it.

With this she left him; but, ere she had gone far, her cunning and curiosity gained the upper hand again, and she whipped behind a great tree and crouched, invisible all but her nose and one piercing eye.

She saw the priest make a few steps homewards, then look around, then take Mrs. Gaunt's letter out of his pocket, press it passionately to his lips, and hide it tenderly in his bosom.

This done he went home with his eyes on the ground as usual, and measured steps. And to all who met him he seemed a creature in whom religion had conquered all human frailty.

Caroline Ryder hurried home with cruel exultation in her black eyes. But she soon found that the first thing she had to do was to defend herself. Leicester and his man met her, and the former looked gloomy, and the latter reproached her bitterly; called her a double-faced jade, and said he would tell the squire of the trick she had played them. But Ryder had her story ready in a moment. "'Tis you I have saved, not him," said she. "He is something more than mortal; why, he told me of his own accord what you were there for; but, that if you

were so unlucky as to lay hands on him, you would rot alive. It seems that has been tried out Stanhope way; a man did but give him a blow, and his arm was stiff next day, and he never used it again; and next his hair fell off his head, and then his eyes they turned to water and ran all out of him, and he died within the twelvemonth."

Country folk were nearly, though not quite, as superstitious at that time as in the middle ages. "Murrain on him," said Leicester. "Catch me laying a finger on him. I'm glad he is gone; and I hope he won't never come back no more."

"Not likely, since he can read all our hearts. Why, he told me something about you, Tom Leicester; he says you are in love."

"No! did he really now?" and Leicester opened his eyes very wide. "And did he tell you who the lass is?"

"He did so; and surprised me properly." This with a haughty glance.

Leicester held his tongue, and turned red.

"Who is it, mistress?" asked the helper.

"He didn't say I was to tell *you*, young man."

And with these two pricks of her needle she left them both more or less discomfited, and went to scrutinize and anatomize her mistress's heart with plenty of cunning, but no mercy. She related her own part in the affair very briefly, but dwelt with well-feigned sympathy on the priest's feelings. "He turned as white as a sheet, ma'am, when I told him, and offered me his very ring off his finger, he was so grateful, poor man!"

"You did not take it, I hope?" said Mrs. Gaunt, quickly.

"La, no, ma'am. I hadn't the heart."

Mrs. Gaunt was silent awhile. When she spoke again it was to inquire whether Ryder had given him the letter.

"That I did: and it brought the tears into his poor

eyes; and such beautiful eyes as he has, to be sure. You would have pitied him if you had seen him read it, and cry over it, and then kiss it and put it in his bosom, he did."

Mrs. Gaunt said nothing, but turned her head away.

The operator shot a sly glance into the looking-glass, and saw a pearly tear trickling down her subject's fair cheek. So she went on, all sympathy outside, and remorselessness within. "To think of that face, more like an angel's than a man's, to be dragged through a nasty horse-pond. 'Tis a shame of master to set his men on a clergyman." And so was proceeding, with well-acted and catching warmth, to dig as dangerous a pit for Mrs. Gaunt as ever was dug for any lady; for whatever Mrs. Gaunt had been betrayed into saying, this Ryder would have used without mercy, and with diabolical skill.

Yes, it was a pit, and the lady's pure but tender heart pushed her towards it, and her fiery temper drew her towards it.

Yet she escaped it this time. The dignity, delicacy, and pride, that is oftener found in these old families than out of them, saved her from that peril. She did not see the trap; but she spurned the bait by native instinct.

She threw up her hand in a moment, with a queenly gesture, and stopped the tempter.

"Not — one — word — from my servant against my husband in *my* hearing!" said she superbly.

And Ryder shrank back into herself directly.

"Child," said Mrs. Gaunt, "you have done me a great service, and my husband too; for, if this dastardly act had been done in his name, he would soon have been heartily ashamed of it and deplored it. Such services can never be quite repaid; but you will find a purse in that drawer with five guineas, it is yours; and, my lav-

ender silk dress, be pleased to wear that about me, to remind me of the good office you have done me. And now, all you can do for me is to leave me; for I am very, very unhappy."

Ryder retired with the spoil, and Mrs. Gaunt leaned her head over her chair, and cried without stint.

After this, no angry words passed between Mr. and Mrs. Gaunt; but something worse, a settled coolness sprung up.

As for Griffith, his cook kept her place, and the priest came no more to the castle; so, having outwardly gained the day, he was ready to forget and forgive; but Kate, though she would not let her servant speak ill of Griffith, was deeply indignant and disgusted with him. She met his advances with such a stern coldness, that he turned sulky and bitter in his turn.

Husband and wife saw little of each other, and hardly spoke.

Both were unhappy; but Kate was angriest, and Griffith saddest.

In an evil hour he let out his grief to Caroline Ryder. She seized the opportunity and, by a show of affectionate sympathy and zeal, made herself almost necessary to him, and contrived to establish a very perilous relation between him and her. Matters went so far as this, that the poor man's eye used to brighten when he saw her coming.

Yet this victory cost her a sore heart and all the patient self-denial of her sex. To be welcome to Griffith she had to speak to him of her rival, and to speak well of her. She tried talking of herself and her attachment, he yawned in her face; she tried smooth detraction and innuendo, he fired up directly and defended her of whose conduct he had been complaining the very moment before.

Then she saw that there was but one way to the man's

heart. Sore, and sick, and smiling, she took that way, resolving to bide her time; to worm herself in anyhow, and wait patiently till she could venture to thrust her mistress out.

If any of my readers need to be told why this she-Machiavel threw her fellow-conspirators over, the reason was simply this: on calm reflection she saw it was not her interest to get Father Leonard insulted. She looked on him as her mistress's lover, and her own best friend. "Was I mad?" said she to herself. "My business is to keep him sweet upon her, till they can't live without one another: and then I'll tell *him;* and take your place in this house, my lady."

And now it is time to visit that extraordinary man, who was the cause of all this mischief; whom Gaunt called a villain, and Mrs. Gaunt a saint; and, as usual, he was neither one nor the other.

Father Leonard was a pious, pure, and noble-minded man, who had undertaken to defy nature with religion's aid; and, after years of successful warfare, now sustained one of those defeats to which such warriors have been liable in every age. If his heart was pure, it was tender; and nature never intended him to live all his days alone. After years of prudent coldness to the other sex, he fell in with a creature that put him off his guard at first, she seemed so angelic. "At Wisdom's gate Suspicion slept;" and, by degrees, which have been already indicated in this narrative, she whom the Church had committed to his spiritual care, became his idol. Could he have foreseen this, it would never have happened; he would have steeled himself, or left the country that contained this sweet temptation. But love stole on him, masked with religious zeal, and robed in a garment of light that seemed celestial.

When the mask fell, it was too late: the power to resist the soft and thrilling enchantment was gone. The solitary man was too deep in love.

Yet he clung still to that self-deception, without which he never could have been entrapped into an earthly passion: he never breathed a word of love to her. It would have alarmed her; it would have alarmed himself. Every syllable that passed between these two might have been published without scandal. But the heart does not speak by words alone: there are looks, and there are tones of voice that belong to Love, and are his signs, his weapons; and it was in these very tones the priest murmured to his gentle listener about "the angelic life" between spirits still lingering on earth, but purged from earthly dross; and even about other topics less captivating to the religious imagination. He had persuaded her to found a school in this dark parish, and in it he taught the poor with exemplary and touching patience. Well, when he spoke to her about this school, it was in words of practical good sense, but in tones of love; and she, being one of those feminine women who catch the tone they are addressed in, and instinctively answer in tune, and, moreover, seeing no ill but good in the *subject* of their conversation, replied sometimes, unguardedly enough, in accents almost as tender.

In truth, if Love was really a personage, as the heathens feigned, he must have often perched on a tree, in that quiet grove, and chuckled and mocked when this man and woman sat and murmured together in the soft seducing twilight about the love of God.

And now things had come to a crisis. Husband and wife went about the house silent and gloomy, the ghosts of their former selves; and the priest sat solitary, benighted, bereaved of the one human creature he cared for. Day succeeded to day, and still she never came.

Every morning he said, "She will come to-day," and brightened with the hope. But the leaden hours crept by and still she came not.

Three sorrowful weeks went by; and he fell into deep dejection. He used to wander out at night, and come and stand where he could see her windows with the moon shining on them, then go slowly home, cold in body, and with his heart aching, lonely, deserted, and perhaps forgotten. Oh, never till now had he known the utter aching sense of being quite alone in this weary world.

One day, as he sat drooping and listless, there came a light foot along the passage, a light tap at the door, and the next moment she stood before him, a little paler than usual, but lovelier than ever, for celestial pity softened her noble features.

The priest started up with a cry of joy that ought to have warned her; but it only brought a faint blush of pleasure to her cheek, and the brimming tears to her eyes.

"Dear father and friend," said she. "What! have you missed me? Think, then, how I have missed *you*. But 'twas best for us both to let their vile passions cool first."

Leonard could not immediately reply. The emotion of seeing her again so suddenly almost choked him.

He needed all the self-possession he had been years acquiring, not to throw himself at her knees and declare his passion to her.

Mrs. Gaunt saw his agitation, but did not interpret it aright.

She came eagerly and sat on a stool beside him. "Dear father," she said, "do not let their insolence grieve you. They have smarted for it, and *shall* smart till they make their submission to you, and beg and entreat you to come to us again. Meantime, since you cannot visit me, I

visit you. Confess me, father, and then direct me with your counsels. Ah! if you could but give me the Christian temper to carry them out firmly but meekly! 'Tis my ungoverned spirit hath wrought all this mischief, *mea culpa! mea culpa!*"

By this time Leonard had recovered his self-possession, and he spent an hour of strange intoxication, confessing his idol, sentencing his idol to light penances, directing and advising his idol, and all in the soft murmurs of a lover.

She left him, and the room seemed to darken.

Two days only elapsed, and she came again. Visit succeeded to visit; and her affection seemed boundless.

The insult he had received was to be avenged in one place, and healed in another, and, if possible, effaced with tender hand.

So she kept all her sweetness for that little cottage, and all her acidity for Hernshaw Castle.

It was an evil hour when Griffith attacked her saint with violence. The woman was too high-spirited, and too sure of her own rectitude, to endure that; so, instead of crushing her, it drove her to retaliation, and to imprudence.

These visits to console Father Leonard were quietly watched by Ryder, for one thing. But, worse than that, they placed Mrs. Gaunt in a new position with Leonard, and one that melts the female heart. She was now the protectress and the consoler of a man she admired and revered. I say if anything on earth can breed love in a grand female bosom, this will.

She had put her foot on a sunny slope clad with innocent looking flowers; but more and more precipitous at every step, and perdition at the bottom.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Father Leonard, visited, soothed, and petted by his idol, recovered his spirits, and, if he pined during her absence, he was always so joyful in her presence that she thought of course he was permanently happy; so then, being by nature magnanimous and placable, she began to smile on her husband again, and a tacit reconciliation came about by natural degrees.

But this produced a startling result.

Leonard, as her confessor, had only to follow precedents and ask questions his Church has printed for the use of confessors, and he soon learned enough to infer that their disunion had given way.

The consequence was that one day, being off his guard, or literally unable to contain his bursting heart any longer, he uttered a cry of jealous agony, and then, in a torrent of burning, melting words, appealed to her pity. He painted her husband's happiness, and his own misery and barren desolation, with a fervid passionate eloquence that paralyzed his hearer, and left her pale and trembling, and the tears of pity trickling down her cheek.

Those silent tears calmed him a little; and he begged her forgiveness and awaited his doom.

"I pity you," said she angelically. "What? *you* jealous of my husband! Oh, pray to Christ and our Lady to cure you of this folly."

She rose, fluttering inwardly, but calm as a statue on the outside, gave him her hand, and went home very slowly; and the moment she was out of his sight she drooped her head like a crushed flower.

She was sad, ashamed, alarmed.

Her mind was in a whirl; and, were I to imitate those writers who undertake to dissect and analyze the heart at such moments, and put the exact result on paper, I should be apt to sacrifice truth to precision; I must stick to my old plan, and tell you what she did: that will surely be some index to her mind, especially with my female readers.

She went home straight to her husband; he was smoking his pipe after dinner. She drew her chair close to him, and laid her hand tenderly on his shoulder. "Griffith," she said, "will you grant your wife a favor? You once promised to take me abroad: I desire to go now: I long to see foreign countries: I am tired of this place. I want a change. Prithee, prithee, take me hence this very day."

Griffith looked aghast. "Why, sweetheart, it takes a deal of money to go abroad: we must get in our rents first."

"Nay, I have a hundred pounds laid by."

"Well, but what a fancy to take all of a sudden!"

"Oh, Griffith, don't deny me what I ask you, with my arm around your neck, dearest. It is no fancy. I want to be alone with *you*, far from this place where coolness has come between us." And with this she fell to crying and sobbing, and straining him tight to her bosom, as if she feared to lose him, or be taken from him.

Griffith kissed her, and told her to cheer up, he was not the man to deny her anything. "Just let me get my hay in," said he, "and I'll take you to Rome, if you like."

"No, no: to-day, or to-morrow at furthest, or you don't love me as I deserve to be loved by you this day."

"Now, Kate, my darling, be reasonable. I *must* get my hay in; and then I am your man."

Mrs. Gaunt had gradually sunk almost to her knees. She now started up with nostrils expanding and her blue eyes glittering. "Your hay!" she cried, with bitter contempt; "your hay before your wife? That is how *you* love me."

And, the next moment, she seemed to turn from a fiery woman to a glacier.

Griffith smiled at all this with that lordly superiority the male of our species sometimes wears when he is behaving like a dull ass; and smoked his pipe, and resolved to indulge her whim as soon as ever he had got his hay in.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Showery weather set in, and the hay had to be turned twice, and left in cocks instead of carried.

Griffith spoke now and then about the foreign tour; but Kate deigned no reply whatever; and the chilled topic died out before the wet hay could be got in: and so much for Procrastination.

Meantime, Betty Gough was sent for to mend the house-linen. She came every other day after dinner, and sat working alone beside Mrs. Gaunt till dark.

Caroline Ryder put her own construction on this, and tried to make friends with Mrs. Gough, intending to pump her. But Mrs. Gough gave her short, dry answers. Ryder then felt sure that Gough was a go-between, and, woman-like, turned up her nose at her with marked contempt. For why? This office of go-between was one she especially coveted for herself under the circumstances; and, a little while ago, it had seemed within her grasp.

One fine afternoon the hay was all carried, and Griffith came home in good spirits to tell his wife he was ready to make the grand tour with her.

He was met at the gate by Mrs. Gough, with a face of great concern; she begged him to come and see the dame; she had slipped on the oak stairs, poor soul, and hurt her back.

Griffith tore up the stairs, and found Kate in the drawing-room lying on a sofa, and her doctor by her side. He came in, trembling like a leaf, and clasped her piteously in his arms. At this she uttered a little patient

sigh of pain, and the doctor begged him to moderate himself: there was no immediate cause of alarm; but she must be kept quiet: she had strained her back, and her nerves were shaken by the fall.

"Oh, my poor Kate!" cried Griffith, and would let nobody else touch her. She was no longer a tall girl, but a statuesque woman; yet he carried her in his herculean arms up to her bed. She turned her head towards him and shed a gentle tear at this proof of his love; but the next moment she was cold again, and seemed weary of her life.

An invalid's bed was sent to her by the doctor at her own request, and placed on a small bedstead. She lay on this at night, and on a sofa by day.

Griffith was now as good as a widower; and Caroline Ryder improved the opportunity. She threw herself constantly in his way, all smiles, small talk, and geniality.

Like many healthy men, your sickness wearied him if it lasted over two days; and, whenever he came out, chilled and discontented, from his invalid wife, there was a fine, buoyant, healthy young woman, ready to chat with him, and brimming over with undisguised admiration.

True, she was only a servant; a servant to the core. But she had been always about ladies, and could wear their surface as readily as she could their gowns. Moreover, Griffith himself lacked dignity and reserve: he would talk to anybody.

The two women began to fill the relative situations of clouds and sunshine.

But, ere this had lasted long, the enticing contact with the object of her lawless fancy inflamed Ryder, and made her so impatient that she struck her long-meditated blow a little prematurely.

The passage outside Mrs. Gaunt's door had a large window: and one day, while Griffith was with his wife,

Ryder composed herself on the window-seat in a forlorn attitude, too striking and unlike her usual gay demeanor to pass unnoticed.

Griffith came out and saw this drooping disconsolate figure. "Hallo!" said he, "what is wrong with *you?*" a little fretfully.

A deep sigh was the only response.

"Had words with your sweetheart?"

"You know I have no sweetheart, sir."

The good-natured squire made an attempt or two to console her and find out what was the matter; but he could get nothing out of her but monosyllables and sighs. At last the crocodile contrived to cry. And having thus secured his pity, she said: —

"There, never heed me. I'm a foolish woman; I can't bear to see my dear master so abused."

"What d'ye mean?" said Griffith, sternly. Her very first shaft wounded his peace of mind.

"Oh, no matter! why should I be your friend and my own enemy? If I tell you I shall lose my place."

"Nonsense, girl, you shall never lose your place while I am here."

"Well, I hope not, sir; for I am very happy here; too happy methinks, when *you* speak kindly to me. Take no notice of what I said. 'Tis best to be blind at times."

The simple squire did not see that this artful creature was playing the stale game of her sex; stimulating his curiosity under pretence of putting him off. He began to fret with suspicion and curiosity, and insisted on her speaking out.

"Ah! but I am so afraid you will hate me," said she; "and that will be worse than losing my place."

Griffith stamped on the ground. "What is it?" said he, fiercely.

Ryder seemed frightened. "It is nothing," said she;

then she paused and added, "but my folly. I can't bear to see you waste your feelings. She is not so ill as you fancy."

"Do you mean to say that my wife is pretending?"

"How can I say that? I wasn't there: *nobody saw her fall;* nor *heard her either;* and the house full of people. No doubt there is something the matter with her; but I do believe her heart is in more trouble than her back."

"And what troubles her heart? Tell me, and she shall not fret long."

"Well, sir: then just you send for Father Leonard: and she will get up and walk as she used, and smile on you as she used. That man is the main of her sickness, you take my word."

Griffith turned sick at heart: and the strong man literally staggered at this envenomed thrust of a weak woman's tongue. But he struggled with the poison.

"What d'ye mean, woman?" said he. "The priest hasn't been near her these two months."

"That is it, sir," replied Ryder, quietly; "*he* is too wise to come here against your will; and *she* is bitter against you for frightening him away. Ask yourself, sir, didn't she change to you the moment that you threatened that Leonard with the horse-pond?"

"That is true!" gasped the wretched husband.

Yet he struggled again. "But she made it up with me after that. Why, 'twas but the other day she begged me to go abroad with her, and take her away from this place."

"Ah? indeed!" said Ryder, bending her black brows, "did she so?"

"That she did," said Griffith, joyfully; "so you see you are mistaken."

"You should have taken her at her word, sir," was all the woman's reply.

"Well, you see the hay was out: so I put it off; and then came the cursed rain day after day; and so she cooled upon it.

"Of course she did, sir." Then, with a solemnity that appalled her miserable listener, "I'd give all I'm worth if you had taken her at her word that minute. But that is the way with you gentlemen; you let the occasion slip, and we that be women never forgive that; she won't give you the same chance again, *I* know. Now if I was not afraid to make you unhappy, I'd tell you why she asked you to go abroad. She felt herself weak and saw her danger; she found she could not resist that Leonard any longer; and she had the sense to see it wasn't worth her while to ruin herself for him; so she asked you to save her from him; that is the plain English. And you didn't."

At this, Griffith's face wore an expression of agony so horrible that Ryder hesitated in her course. "There, there," said she, "pray don't look so, dear master! after all, there's nothing certain; and perhaps I am too severe where I see you ill-treated; and to be sure no woman could be cold to *you* unless she was bewitched out of her seven senses by some other man. I couldn't use you as mistress does; but then, there's nobody I care a straw for in these parts, except my dear master."

Griffith took no notice of this overture; the potent poison of jealousy was coursing through all his veins and distorting his ghastly face.

"O God!" he gasped, "can this thing be? My wife! the mother of my child! It is a lie! I can't believe it! I won't believe it. Have pity on me, woman, and think again, and unsay your words; for, if 'tis so, there will be murder in this house."

Ryder was alarmed. "Don't talk so," said she, hastily; "no woman born is worth that; besides, as you

say, what do we know against her? She is a gentlewoman, and well brought up. Now, dear master, you have got one friend in this house, and that is me. I know women better than you do. Will you be ruled by me?"

"Yes, I will; for I do believe you care a little for me."

"Then don't you believe anything against our dame. Keep quiet till you know more. Don't you be so simple as to accuse her to her face, or you'll never learn the truth. Just you watch her quietly, without seeming, and I'll help you. Be a man, and know the truth."

"I will!" said Griffith, grinding his teeth. "And I believe she will come out pure as snow."

"Well, I hope so, too," said Ryder, dryly. Then she added, "But don't you be seen speaking to me too much, sir, or she will suspect me, and then she will be on her guard with *me*. When I have anything particular to tell you I'll cough, so, and then I'll run out into the grove; nobody goes there now."

Griffith did not see the hussy was contriving a series of assignations. He fell into the trap bodily.

The life this man led was now infernal.

He watched his wife night and day to detect her heart; he gave up hunting, he deserted the "Red Lion." If he went out of doors, it was but a step; he hovered about the place to see if messages came or went, and he spent hours in his wife's bedroom, watching her, grim, silent, and sombre, to detect her inmost heart. His flesh wasted visibly, and his ruddy color paled. Hell was in his heart. Ay, two hells: jealousy and suspense.

Mrs. Gaunt saw directly that something was amiss, and ere long she divined what it was.

But, if he was jealous, she was proud as Lucifer. So she met his ever-watchful eye with the face of a marble statue.

Only in secret her heart quaked and yearned, and she shed many a furtive tear, and was sore, sore perplexed.

Meantime Ryder was playing with her master's anguish like a cat with a mouse.

Upon the pretence of some petty discovery or other, she got him out day after day into the grove, and, to make him believe in her candor and impartiality, would give him feeble reasons for thinking his wife loved him still; taking care to overpower these reasons with some little piece of strong good sense and subtle observation.

It is the fate of moral poisoners to poison themselves as well as their victims. This is a just retribution, and it fell upon this female Iago. Her wretched master now loved his wife to distraction, yet hated her to the death; and Ryder loved her master passionately, yet hated him intensely, by fits and starts.

These secret meetings on which she had counted so, what did she gain by them? She saw that, with all her beauty, intelligence, and zeal for him, she was nothing to him still. He suspected, he sometimes hated his wife, but he was always full of her. There was no getting any other wedge into his heart.

This so embittered Ryder that one day she revenged herself on him.

He had been saying that no earthly torment could equal his; all his watching had shown him nothing for certain. "Oh," said he, "if I could only get proof of her innocence, or proof of her guilt! Anything better than the misery of doubt. It gnaws my heart, it consumes my flesh. I can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't sit down. I envy the dead that lie at peace. Oh, my heart! my heart!"

"And all for a woman that is not young, nor half so handsome as yourself. Well, sir, I'll try and cure you of your *doubt*, if that is what torments you. When you

threatened that Leonard, he got his orders to come here no more. But *she* visited him at his place again and again."

"'Tis false! How know you that?"

"As soon as your back was turned she used to order her horse and ride to him."

"How do you know she went to *him?*"

"I mounted the tower, and saw the way she took."

Griffith's face was a piteous sight. He stammered out, "Well, he is her confessor. She always visited him at times."

"Ay, sir; but in those days her blood was cool, and his too; but bethink you now, when you threatened the man with the horse-pond, he became your enemy. All revenge is sweet, but what revenge is so sweet to any man as that which came to his arms of its own accord? I do notice that men can't read men, but any woman can read a woman. Maids they are reserved, because their mothers have told them that is the only way to get married. But what have a wife and a priest to keep them distant? Can they ever hope to come together lawfully? That is why a priest's light-o'-love is always some honest man's wife. What had those two to keep them from folly? Old Betty Gough? Why, the mistress had bought her, body and soul, long ago. No, sir, you had no friend there; and you had three enemies — love, revenge, and opportunity. Why, what did the priest say to me? I met him not ten yards from here. 'Ware the horse-pond!' says I. Says he, '*Since I am to have the bitter, I'll have the sweet as well.*'"[1]

These infernal words were not spoken in vain. Griffith's features were horribly distorted, his eyes rolled fearfully, and he fell to the ground, grinding his teeth, and foaming at the mouth. An epileptic fit!

[1] Compare this statement with p. 224.

An epileptic fit is a terrible sight: the simple description of one in our medical books is appalling.

And in this case it was all the more fearful, the subject being so strong and active.

Caroline Ryder shrieked with terror, but no one heard her; at all events, no one came; to be sure the place had a bad name for ghosts, etc.

She tried to hold his head, but could not, for his body kept bounding from the earth with inconceivable elasticity and fury, and his arms flew in every direction; and presently Ryder received a violent blow that almost stunned her.

She lay groaning and trembling beside the victim of her poisonous tongue and of his own passion.

When she recovered herself he was snorting rather than breathing, but lying still and pale enough, his eyes set and glassy.

She got up, and went with uneven steps to a little rill hard by, and plunged her face in it; then filled her beaver hat, and came and dashed water repeatedly in his face.

He came to his senses by degrees, but was weak as an infant. Then Ryder wiped the foam from his lips, and, kneeling on her knees, laid a soft hand upon his heavy head, shedding tears of pity and remorse, and sick at heart herself.

For what had she gained by blackening her rival? The sight of *his* bodily agony, and *his* ineradicable love.

Mrs. Gaunt sat out of shot, cold, calm, superior.

Yet, in the desperation of her passion, it was something to nurse his weak head an instant and shed hot tears upon his brow; it was a positive joy, and soon proved a fresh and inevitable temptation.

"My poor master," said she, tenderly, "I never will say a word to you again. It is better to be blind. My

God! how you cling to her that feigns a broken back to be rid of you, when there are others as well to look at, and ever so much younger, that adore every hair on your head, and would follow you round the world for one kind look."

"Let no one love me like that," said Griffith feebly; "to love so, is to be miserable."

"Pity her then, at least," murmured Ryder; and, feeling she had quite committed herself now, her bosom panted under Griffith's ear, and she told him the secret she had kept till now.

My female readers will sneer at this temptation: my male readers know that scarcely one man out of a dozen, sick, sore, and hating her he loved, would have turned away from the illicit consolation thus offered to him in his hour of weakness, with soft seducing tones, warm tears, and heart that panted at his ear.

CHAPTER XXV.

How did poor, faulty Griffith receive it?

He raised his head, and turned his brown eye gentle but full upon her. "My poor girl," said he, "I see what you are driving at. But that will not do. I have nothing to give you in exchange. I hate my wife that I loved so dear: d——n her! d——n her! But I hate all womankind for her sake. Keep you clear of me. I would ruin no poor girl for heartless sport. I shall have blood on my hands ere long, and that is enough."

And, with these alarming words, he seemed suddenly to recover all his vigor; for he rose and stalked away at once, and never looked behind him.

Ryder made no further attempt. She sat down and shed bitter tears of sorrow and mortification.

After this cruel rebuff she must hate somebody; and with the justice of her sex, she pitched on Mrs. Gaunt, and hated her like a demon, and watched to do her a mischief by hook or by crook.

Griffith's appearance and manner caused Mrs. Gaunt very serious anxiety. His clothes hung loose on his wasted frame; his face was one of uniform sallow tint, like a maniac's; and he sat silent for hours beside his wife, eying her askant from time to time like a surly mastiff guarding some treasure.

She divined what was passing in his mind, and tried to soothe him; but almost in vain. He was sometimes softened for the moment; but *hæret lateri lethalis arundo;* he still hovered about, watching her and tormenting himself; gnawed mad by three vultures of the mind — doubt, jealousy, and suspense.

Then Mrs. Gaunt wrote letters to Father Leonard: hitherto she had only sent him short messages.

Betty Gough carried these letters and brought the answers.

Griffith, thanks to the hint Ryder had given him, suspected this, and waylaid the old woman, and roughly demanded to see the letter she was carrying. She stoutly protested she had none. He seized her, turned her pockets inside out, and found a bunch of keys; item, a printed dialogue between Peter and Herod, omitted in the canonical books, but described by the modern discoverer as an infallible charm for the toothache; item, a brass thimble; item, half a nutmeg.

"Curse your cunning," said he; and he went off muttering.

The old woman tottered trembling to Mrs. Gaunt, related this outrage with an air of injured innocence, then removed her cap, undid her hair, and took out a letter from Leonard.

"This must end, and shall," said Mrs. Gaunt firmly; "else it will drive him mad and me too."

Bolton fair-day came. It was a great fair, and had attractions for all classes. There were cattle and horses of all kinds for sale, and also shows, games, wrestling, and dancing till daybreak.

All the servants had a prescriptive right to go to this fair: and Griffith himself had never missed one. He told Kate over-night he would go, if it were not for leaving her alone.

The words were kinder than their meaning; but Mrs. Gaunt had the tact, or the candor, to take them in their best sense. "And I would go with you, my dear," said she; "but I should only be a drag. Never heed me: give yourself a day's pleasure, for indeed you need it. I am in care about you: you are so dull of late."

"Well, I will," said Griffith. "I'll not mope here when all the rest are merry-making."

Accordingly, next day about eleven in the morning, he mounted his horse and rode to the fair, leaving the house empty; for all the servants were gone except the old housekeeper; she was tied to the fireside by rheumatics. Even Ryder started, with a new bonnet and red ribbons; but that was only a blind. She slipped back and got unperceived into her own bedroom.

Griffith ran through the fair; but could not enjoy it. *Hærebat lateri arundo.* He came galloping back to watch his wife, and see whether Betty Gough had come again or not.

As he rode into the stable-yard he caught sight of Ryder's face at an upper window. She looked pale and agitated, and her black eyes flashed with a strange expression. She made him a signal which he did not understand; but she joined him directly after in the stable-yard.

"Come quietly with me," said she, solemnly.

He hooked his horse's rein to the wall, and followed her trembling.

She took him up the back stairs, and, when she got on the landing, she turned and said, "Where did you leave her?"

"In her own room."

"See if she is there now," said Ryder, pointing to the door.

Griffith tore the door open: the room was empty.

"Nor is she to be found in the house," said Ryder; "for I've been in every room."

Griffith's face turned livid, and he staggered and leaned against the wall. "Where is she?" said he hoarsely.

"Humph!" said Ryder fiendishly. "Find *him*, and you will find *her*."

"I'll find them if they are above ground," cried Griffith furiously; and he rushed into his bedroom and soon came out again, with a fearful purpose written on his ghastly features and in his bloodshot eyes; and a loaded pistol in his hand.

Ryder was terrified; but instead of succumbing to terror, she flew at him like a cat and wreathed her arms round him.

"What would you do?" cried she. "Madman, would you hang for them? and break my heart; the only woman in the world that loves you. Give me the pistol. Nay, I will have it."

And, with that extraordinary power excitement lends her sex, she wrenched it out of his hands.

He gnashed his teeth with fury, and clutched her with a grip of iron; she screamed with pain: he relaxed his grasp a little at that: she turned on him and defied him.

"I won't let you get into trouble for a priest and a wanton," she cried; "you shall kill me first. Leave me the pistol, and pledge me your sacred word to do them no harm, and then I'll tell you where they are. Refuse me this, and you shall go to your grave and know nothing more than you know now."

"No, no: if you are a woman have pity on me; let me come at them. There, I'll use no weapon. I'll tear them to atoms with these hands. Where are they?"

"May I put the pistol away, then?"

"Yes, take it out of my sight; so best. Where are they?"

Ryder locked the pistol up in one of Mrs. Gaunt's boxes. Then she said in a trembling voice, "Follow me."

He followed her in awful silence.

She went rather slowly to the door that opened on the lawn; and then she hesitated. "If you are a man, and

have any feeling for a poor girl who loves you; if you are a gentleman, and respect your word — no violence."

"I promise," said he. "*Where are they?*"

"Nay, nay. I fear I shall rue the day I told you. Promise me once more: no bloodshed — upon your soul."

"I promise. *Where are they?*"

"God forgive me; they are in the grove."

He bounded away from her like some beast of prey; and she crouched and trembled on the steps of the door: and, now that she realized what she was doing, a sickening sense of dire misgiving came over her and made her feel quite faint.

And so the weak but dangerous creature sat crouching and quaking, and launched the strong one.

Griffith was soon in the grove; and the first thing he saw was Leonard and his wife walking together in earnest conversation. Their backs were towards him. Mrs. Gaunt, whom he had left lying on a sofa, and who professed herself scarce able to walk half a dozen times across the room, was now springing along, elastic as a young greyhound, and full of fire and animation. The miserable husband saw, and his heart died within him.

He leaned against a tree and groaned.

The deadly sickness of his heart soon gave way to sombre fury. He came softly after them, with ghastly cheek, and bloodthirsty eyes, like red-hot coals.

They stopped; and he heard his wife say, "'Tis a solemn promise, then; this very night." The priest bowed assent. Then they spoke in so low a voice, he could not hear; but his wife pressed a purse upon Leonard, and Leonard hesitated, but ended by taking it.

Griffith uttered a yell like a tiger, and rushed between them with savage violence, driving the lady one way with his wrists, and the priest another. She screamed; he trembled in silence.

Griffith stood a moment between these two pale faces, silent and awful.

Then he faced his wife. "You vile wretch!" he cried: "so you *buy* your own dishonor and mine." He raised his hand high over her head; she never winced. "Oh! but for my oath, I'd lay you dead at my feet. But no; I'll not hang for a priest and a wanton. So, *this* is the thing you love, and pay it to love you." And with all the mad inconsistency of rage, which mixes small things and great, he tore the purse out of Leonard's hand: then seized him felly by the throat.

At that the high spirit of Mrs. Gaunt gave way to abject terror. "Oh, mercy! mercy!" she cried; "it is all a mistake." And she clung to his knees.

He spurned her furiously away. "Don't touch me, woman," he cried; "or you are dead. Look at this!" And in a moment, with gigantic strength and fury, he dashed the priest down at her feet. "I know ye, ye proud devil," he cried; "love the thing you have seen me tread upon! love it — if you can." And he literally trampled upon the poor priest with both feet.

Leonard shrieked for mercy.

"None, in this world or the next," roared Griffith; but the next moment he took fright at himself. "God!" he cried, "I must go, or kill. Live, and be damned for ever, the pair of ye." And with this he fled from them, grinding his teeth and beating the air with his clenched fists.

He darted to the stable yard, sprang on his horse, and galloped away from Hernshaw Castle, with the face, the eyes, the gestures, the incoherent mutterings, of a raving Bedlamite.

CHAPTER XXVI.

At the fair the wrestling was ended, and the tongues going over it all again, and throwing the victors; the greasy pole, with leg of mutton attached by ribbons, was being hoisted, and the swings flying, and the lads and lasses footing it to the fife and tabor, and the people chattering in groups; when the clatter of a horse's feet was heard, and a horseman burst in and rode recklessly through the market-place; indeed, if his noble horse had been as rash as he was, some would have been trampled under foot. The rider's face was ghastly: such as were not exactly in his path, had time to see it, and wonder how this terrible countenance came into that merry place. Thus, as he passed, shouts of dismay arose, and a space opened before him, and then closed behind him with a great murmur that followed at his heels.

Tom Leicester was listening, spell-bound, on the outskirts of the throng, to the songs and humorous tirades of a peddler selling his wares; and was saying to himself, "I too will be a peddler." Hearing the row, he turned round, and saw his master just coming down with that stricken face.

Tom could not decipher his own name in print or manuscript; and these are the fellows that beat us all at reading countenances: he saw in a moment that some great calamity had fallen on Griffith's head; and nature stirred in him. He darted to his master's side, and seized the bridle. "What is up?" he cried.

But Griffith did not answer, nor notice; his ears were almost deaf, and his eyes, great and staring, were fixed

right ahead; and to all appearance, he did not see the people: he seemed to be making for the horizon.

"Master! for the love of heaven, speak to me," cried Leicester. "What have they done to you? Whither be you going, with the face of a ghost?"

"Away, from the hangman," shrieked Griffith, still staring at the horizon. "Stay me not; my hands itch for their throats; my heart thirsts for their blood; but I'll not hang for a priest and a wanton." Then he suddenly turned on Leicester, "Let thou go, or"— and he lifted up his heavy riding-whip.

Then Leicester let go the rein, and the whip descended on the horse's flank; he went clattering furiously over the stones, and drove the thinner groups apart like chaff, and his galloping feet were soon heard fainter and fainter till they died away in the distance. Leicester stood gaping.

Griffith's horse, a black hunter of singular power and beauty, carried his wretched master well that day; he went on till sunset, trotting, cantering, and walking, without intermission; the whip ceased to touch him, the rein never checked him. He found he was the master, and he went his own way. He took his broken rider back into the county where he had been foaled. But a few miles from his native place they came to the "Packhorse," a pretty little roadside inn, with a farm-yard and buildings at the back. He had often baited here in his infancy; and now, stiff and stumbling with fatigue, the good horse could not pass the familiar place; he walked gravely into the stable-yard, and there fairly came to an end; craned out his drooping head, crooked his limbs, and seemed of wood. And no wonder. He was ninety-three miles from his last corn.

Paul Carrick, a young farrier who frequented the "Packhorse," happened just then to be lounging at the

kitchen door, and saw him come in. He turned directly, and shouted into the house, "Ho! Master Vint, come hither. Here's Black Dick come home, and brought you a worshipful customer."

The landlord bustled out of the kitchen, crying, "They are welcome both." Then he came lowly louting to Griffith, cap in hand, and held the horse, poor immovable brute; and his wife courtesied perseveringly at the door.

Griffith dismounted, and stood there looking like one in a dream.

"Please you come in, sir," said the landlady, smiling professionally.

He followed her mechanically.

"Would your worship be private? We keep a parlor for gentles."

"Ay, let me be alone," he groaned.

Mercy Vint, the daughter, happened to be on the stairs and heard him: the voice startled her, and she turned round directly to look at the speaker; but she only saw his back going into the room, and then he flung himself like a sack into the arm-chair.

The landlady invited him to order supper; he declined. She pressed him. He flung a piece of money on the table, and told her savagely to score his supper, and leave him in peace.

She flounced out with a red face, and complained to her husband in the kitchen.

Harry Vint rung the crown piece on the table before he committed himself to a reply. It rang like a bell. "Churl or not, his coin is good," said Harry Vint, philosophically. "I'll eat his supper, dame, for that matter."

"Father," whispered Mercy, "I do think the gentleman is in trouble."

"And that is no business of mine, neither," said Harry Vint.

Presently the guest they were discussing called loudly for a quart of burnt wine.

When it was ready, Mercy offered to take it in to him. She was curious. The landlord looked up rather surprised; for his daughter attended to the farm, but fought shy of the inn and its business.

"Take it, lass, and welcome for me," said Mrs. Vint, pettishly.

Mercy took the wine in, and found Griffith with his head buried in his hands.

She stood a while with the tray, not knowing what to do.

Then, as he did not move, she said softly, "The wine, sir, an if it please you."

Griffith lifted his head, and turned two eyes clouded with suffering upon her; he saw a buxom, blooming young woman, with remarkably dove-like eyes that dwelt with timid, kindly curiosity upon him. He looked at her in a half distracted way, and then put his hand to the mug. "Here's perdition to all false women!" said he, and tossed half the wine down at a single draught.

"'Tis not to me you drink, sir," said Mercy, with gentle dignity. Then she courtesied modestly and retired, discouraged, not offended.

The wretched Griffith took no notice — did not even see he had repulsed a friendly visitor. The wine, taken on an empty stomach, soon stupefied him, and he staggered to bed.

He awoke at daybreak; and, oh the agony of that waking!

He lay sighing a while, with his hot skin quivering on his bones, and his heart like lead; then got up and flung

his clothes on hastily, and asked how far to the nearest sea-port.

Twenty miles.

He called for his horse. The poor brute was dead lame.

He cursed that good servant for going lame. He walked round and round like a wild beast, chafing and fuming a while; then sank into a torpor of dejection, and sat with his head bowed on the table all day.

He ate scarcely any food; but drank wine freely, remarking, however, that it was false-hearted stuff; did him no good; and had no taste as wine used to have. "But nothing is what it was," said he. "Even I was happy once. But that seems years ago."

"Alas! poor gentleman; God comfort you," said Mercy Vint, and came with the tears in her dove-like eyes, and said to her father, "To be sure his worship hath been crossed in love; and what could she be thinking of? Such a handsome, well-made gentleman!"

"Now that is a wench's first thought," said Harry Vint: "more likely lost his money gambling, or racing. But, indeed, I think 'tis his head is disordered, not his heart. I wish the 'Packhorse' was quit of him, maugre his laced coat. We want no kill-joys here."

That night he was heard groaning and talking, and did not come down at all.

So at noon Mrs. Vint knocked at his door: a weak voice bade her enter; she found him shivering, and he asked her for a fire.

She grumbled, out of hearing, but lighted a fire.

Presently his voice was heard hallooing: he wanted all the windows open: he was so burning hot.

The landlady looked at him, and saw his face was flushed and swollen: and he complained of pain in all his bones. She opened the windows, and asked him

would he have a doctor sent for: he shook his head contemptuously.

However, towards evening he became delirious, and raved and tossed, and rolled his head as if it was an intolerable weight he wanted to get rid of.

The females of the family were for sending at once for a doctor; but the prudent Harry demurred.

"Tell me, first, who is to pay the fee," said he. "I've seen a fine coat with the pockets empty, before to-day."

The women set up their throats at him with one accord, each after her kind.

"Out, fie!" said Mercy: "are we to do nought for charity?"

"Why, there's his horse, ye foolish man," said Mrs. Vint.

"Ay, ye are both wiser than me," said Harry Vint, ironically. And soon after that he went out softly.

The next minute he was in the sick man's room, examining his pockets. To his infinite surprise, he found twenty gold pieces, a quantity of silver, and some trinkets.

He spread them all out on the table and gloated on them with greedy eyes. They looked so inviting, that he said to himself, they would be safer in his custody than in that of a delirious person, who was even now raving incoherently before him, and could not see what he was doing. He therefore proceeded to transfer them to his own care.

On the way to his pocket, his shaking hand was arrested by another hand, soft, but firm as iron. He shuddered and looked round in abject terror; and there was his daughter's face, pale as his own, but full of resolution. "Nay, father," said she; "*I* must take charge of these: and well do you know why."

These simple words cowed Harry Vint, so that he instantly resigned the money and jewels, and retired,

muttering that "things were come to a pretty pass,"—"a man was no longer master in his own house," etc., etc., etc.

While he inveighed against the degeneracy of the age, the women paid him no more attention than the age did, but just sent for the doctor. He came and bled the patient. This gave him a momentary relief; but when, in the natural progress of the disease, sweating and weakness came on, the loss of the precious vital fluid was fatal, and the patient's pulse became scarce perceptible. There he lay, with wet hair, and gleaming eyes, and haggard face, at death's door.

An experienced old crone was got to nurse him, and she told Mrs. Vint he would live maybe three days.

Paul Carrick used to come to the "Packhorse" after Mercy Vint, and, finding her sad, asked her what was the matter.

"What should it be," said she, "but the poor gentleman a-dying overhead; away from all his friends."

"Let me see him," said Paul.

Mercy took him softly into the room.

"Ay, he is booked," said the farrier. "Doctor has taken too much blood out of the man's body. They kill a many that way."

"Alack, Paul! must he die? Can nought be done?" said Mercy, clasping her hands.

"I don't say that, neither," said the farrier. "He is a well-made man: he is young. *I* might save him, perhaps, if I had not so many beasts to look to. I'll tell you what to do. Make him soup as strong as strong; have him watched night and day, and let 'em put a spoonful of warm wine into him every hour, and then of soup; egg flip is a good thing, too; change his bed-linen, and keep the doctors from him: that is his only chance: he is fairly dying of weakness. But I must be off;

Farmer Blake's cow is down for calving: I must give her an ounce of salts before 'tis too late."

Mercy Vint scanned the patient closely, and saw that Paul Carrick was right. She followed his instructions to the letter, with one exception. Instead of trusting to the old woman, of whom she had no very good opinion, she had the great arm-chair brought into the sick-room, and watched the patient herself by night and day: a gentle hand cooled his temples; a gentle hand brought concentrated nourishment to his lips; and a mellow voice coaxed him to be good and swallow it. There are voices it is not natural to resist; and Griffith learned by degrees to obey this one, even when he was half unconscious.

At the end of three days this zealous young nurse thought she discerned a slight improvement, and told her mother so. Then the old lady came and examined the patient, and shook her head gravely. Her judgment, like her daughter's, was influenced by her wishes.

The fact is, both landlord and landlady were now calculating upon Griffith's decease. Harry had told her about the money and jewels, and the pair had put their heads together, and settled that Griffith was a gentleman highwayman, and his spoil would never be reclaimed after his decease, but fall to those good Samaritans who were now nursing him, and intended to bury him respectably. The future being thus settled, this worthy couple became a little impatient; for Griffith, like Charles the Second, was "an unconscionable time dying."

We order dinner to hasten a lingering guest, and, with equal force of logic, mine host of the "Packhorse" spoke to White, the village carpenter, about a full-sized coffin; and his wife set the old crone to make a linen shroud, unobtrusively, in the bakehouse.

On the third afternoon of her nursing, Mercy left her

patient, and called up the crone to tend him. She herself, worn out with fatigue, threw herself on a bed in her mother's room, hard by, and soon fell asleep.

She had slept about two hours when she was wakened by a strange noise in the sick-chamber. A man and a woman quarrelling.

She bounded off the bed, and was in the room directly.

Lo and behold, there were the nurse and the dying man abusing one another like pickpockets.

The cause of this little misunderstanding was not far to seek. The old crone had brought up her work, videlicet, a winding-sheet all but finished, and certain strips of glazed muslin about three inches deep. She soon completed the winding-sheet, and hung it over two chairs in the patient's sight; she then proceeded to double the slips in six, and nick them; then she unrolled them, and they were frills, and well adapted to make the coming corpse absurd, and divest it of any little dignity the King of Terrors might bestow on it.

She was so intent upon her congenial task, that she did not observe the sick man had awakened, and was viewing her and her work with an intelligent but sinister eye.

"What is that you are making?" said he, grimly.

The voice was rather clear, and strong, and seemed so loud and strange in that still chamber, that it startled the woman mightily. She uttered a little shriek, and then was wroth. "Plague take the man!" said she; "how you scared me! Keep quiet, do; and mind your own business." [The business of going off the hooks.]

"I ask you what is that you are making," said Griffith, louder; and raising himself on his arm.

"Baby's frills," replied the woman, coolly, recovering that contempt for the understandings of the dying, which marks the veritable crone.

"Ye lie," said Griffith. "And there is a shroud. Who is that for?"

"Who should it be for, thou simple body? Keep quiet, do, till the change comes. 'Twon't be long now; art too well to last till sundown."

"So 'tis for me, is it?" screamed Griffith. "I'll disappoint ye yet. Give me my clothes. I'll not lie here to be measured for my grave, ye old witch."

"Here's manners!" cackled the indignant crone. "Ye foul-mouthed knave! is this how you thank a decent woman for making a comfortable corpse of ye, you that has no right to die in your shoes, let a be such dainties as muslin neck-ruff, and shroud of good Dutch flax."

At this Griffith discharged a volley, in which "vulture," "hag," "blood-sucker," etc., blended with as many oaths; during which Mercy came in.

She glided to him, with her dove's eyes full of concern, and laid her hand gently on his shoulder; "You'll work yourself a mischief," said she; "leave me to scold her. Why, my good Nelly, how could you be so harebrained? prithee take all that trumpery away this minute; none here needeth it, nor shall not this many a year, please God."

"They want me dead," said Griffith to her, piteously, finding he had got one friend; and sunk back on his pillow exhausted.

"So it seems," said Mercy, cunningly. "But I'd balk them finely. I'd up and order a beef-steak this minute."

"And shall," said Griffith, with feeble spite. "Leastways, do you order it, and I'll eat it; d——n her!"

Sick men are like children; and women soon find that out, and manage them accordingly. In ten minutes Mercy brought a good rump-steak to the bedside, and said, "Now for't. Marry come up, with her winding-sheets!"

Thus played upon, and encouraged, the great baby ate more than half the steak; and soon after perspired gently, and fell asleep.

Paul Carrick found him breathing gently, with a slight tint of red in his cheek; and told Mercy there was a change for the better. "We have brought him to a true intermission," said he; "so throw in the bark at once."

"What, drench his honor's worship!" said Mercy, innocently. "Nay, send thou the medicine, and I'll find womanly ways to get it down him."

Next day came the doctor, and whispered softly to Mrs. Vint, "How are we all up-stairs?"

"Why couldn't you come afore?" replied Mrs. Vint, crossly. "Here's farrier Carrick stepped in, and curing him out of hand; the meddlesome body."

"A farrier rob me of my patient!" cried the doctor, in high dudgeon.

"Nay, good sir, 'tis no fault of mine. This Paul is a sort of a kind of a follower of our Mercy's; and she is mistress here, I trow."

"And what hath his farriership prescribed? Friar's balsam, belike."

"Nay, I know not; but you may soon learn, for he is above, physicking the gentleman (a pretty gentleman!) and suiting to our Mercy — after a manner."

The doctor declined to make one in so mixed a consultation.

"Give me my fee, dame," said he; "and as for this impertinent farrier, the patient's blood be on his head; and I'd have him beware the law."

Mrs. Vint went to the stair-foot, and screamed, "Mercy, the good doctor wants his fee. Who is to pay it, I wonder?"

"I'll bring it him anon," said a gentle voice; and

Mercy soon came down and paid it with a willing air that half disarmed professional fury.

"'Tis a good lass, dame," said the doctor, when she was gone; "and, by the same token, I wish her better mated than to a scrub of a farrier."

Griffith, still weak, but freed of fever, woke one glorious afternoon, and heard a bird-like voice humming a quaint old ditty, and saw a field of golden wheat through an open window, and seated at that window the mellow songstress, Mercy Vint, plying her needle, with lowered lashes but beaming face, a picture of health and quiet womanly happiness. Things were going to her mind in that sick-room.

He looked at her, and at the golden corn and summer haze beyond, and the tide of life seemed to rush back upon him.

"My good lass," said he, "tell me, where am I? for I know not."

Mercy started, and left off singing, then rose and came slowly towards him, with her work in her hand.

Innocent joy at this new symptom of convalescence flushed her comely features, but she spoke low.

"Good sir, at the 'Packhorse,'" said she, smiling.

"The 'Packhorse'? and where is that?"

"Hard by Allerton village."

"And where is that? not in Cumberland?"

"Nay, in Lancashire, your worship. Why, whence come you that know not the 'Packhorse,' nor yet Allerton township? Come you from Cumberland?"

"No matter whence I come. I'm going on board ship, like my father before me."

"Alas, sir, you are not fit: you have been very ill, and partly distraught."

She stopped: for Griffith turned his face to the wall with a deep groan. It had all rushed over him in a moment.

Mercy stood still, and worked on, but the water gathered in her eyes at that eloquent groan.

By and by Griffith turned round again, with a face of anguish, and filmy eyes, and saw her in the same place standing, working, and pitying.

"What, are *you* there still?" said he roughly.

"Ay, sir; but I'll go sooner than be troublesome. Can I fetch you anything?"

"No. Ay, wine; bring me wine to drown it all."

She brought him a pint of wine.

"Pledge me," said he, with a miserable attempt at a smile.

She put the cup to her lips, and sipped a drop or two; but her dove's eyes were looking up at him over the liquor all the time. Griffith soon disposed of the rest, and asked for more.

"Nay," said she, "but I dare not: the doctor hath forbidden excess in drinking."

"The doctor! what doctor?"

"Doctor Paul," said she demurely. "He hath saved your life, sir, I do think."

"Plague take him for that!"

"So say not I."

Here she left him with an excuse. "'Tis milking-time, sir; and you shall know that I am our dairymaid. I seldom trouble the inn."

Next day she was on the window-seat, working and beaming. The patient called to her in peevish accents to put his head higher. She laid down her work with a smile, and came and raised his head.

"There, now, that is too high," said he: "how awkward you are."

"I lack experience, sir, but not good will. There, now, is that a little better?"

"Ay, a little. I'm sick of lying here: I want to

get up. Dost hear what I say? I — want — to get up."

"And so you shall. As soon as ever you are fit. To-morrow, perhaps. To-day you must e'en be patient. Patience is a rare medicine."

Tic, tic, tic! "What a noise they are making downstairs! Go, lass, and bid them hold their peace."

Mercy shook her head. "Good lack-a-day! we might as well bid the river give over running; but, to be sure, this comes of keeping a hostelry, sir. When we had only the farm, we were quiet, and did no ill to no one."

"Well, sing me, to drown their eternal buzzing: it worries me dead."

"Me sing! alack, sir, I'm no songster."

"That is false. You sing like a throstle. I dote on music; and, when I was delirious, I heard one singing about my bed; I thought it was an angel at that time; but 'twas only you, my young mistress; and now I ask you, you say me nay. That is the way with you all. Plague take the girl, and all her curst, unreasonable, hypocritical sex! I warrant me you'd sing if I wanted to sleep, and dance the devil to a standstill."

Mercy, instead of flouncing out of the room, stood looking on him with maternal eyes, and chuckling like a bird.

"That is right, sir: tax us all to your heart's content. Oh, but I'm a joyful woman to hear you; for 'tis a sure sign of mending when the sick take to rating of their nurses."

"In sooth, I am too cross-grained," said Griffith, relenting.

"Not a whit, sir, for my taste. I've been in care for you: and now you are a little cross, that maketh me easy."

"Thou art a good soul. Wilt sing me a stave after all?"

"La, you now; how you come back to that! Ay, and with a good heart; for, to be sure, 'tis a sin to gainsay a sick man. But indeed I am the homeliest singer. Methinks 'tis time I went down and bade them cook your worship's supper."

"Nay, I'll not eat nor sup till I hear thee sing."

"Your will is my law, sir," said Mercy dryly, and retired to the window-seat: that was the first obvious preliminary. Then she fiddled with her apron, and hemm'd and waited in hopes a reprieve might come; but a peevish, relentless voice demanded the song at intervals.

So then she turned her head carefully away from her hearer, lowered her eyes, and, looking the picture of guilt and shame all the time, sang an ancient ditty. The poltroon's voice was rich, mellow, clear, and sweet as honey; and she sang the notes for the sake of the words, not the words for the sake of the notes, as all but Nature's singers do.

The air was grave as well as sweet; for Mercy was of an old Puritan stock, and even her songs were not giddy-paced, but solid, quaint, and tender; all the more did they reach the soul.

In vain was the blushing cheek averted, and the honeyed lips: the ravishing tones set the birds chirping outside, yet filled the room within, and the glasses rang in harmony upon the shelf as the sweet singer poured out from her heart (so it seemed) the speaking song that begins thus: —

In vain you tell your parting lover
You wish fair winds may waft him over.
Alas, what winds can happy prove
That bear me far from her I love?
Alas, what dangers on the main,
Can equal those that I sustain
From slighted love and cold disdain?

Griffith beat time with his hand awhile, and his own face softened and beautified as the melody curled about his heart. But soon it was too much for him; he knew the song: had sung it to Kate Peyton in their days of courtship. A thousand memories gushed in upon his soul and overpowered him. He burst out sobbing violently, and wept as if his heart must break.

"Alas! what have I done?" said Mercy; and the tears ran swiftly from her eyes at the sight. Then, with native delicacy, she hurried from the room.

What Griffith went through that night, in silence, was never known but to himself. But the next morning he was a changed man. He was all dogged resolution: put on his clothes unaided, though he could hardly stand to do it; and borrowed the landlord's staff, and crawled out a smart distance into the sun. "It was kill or cure," said he. "I am to live, it seems. Well, then, the past is dead. My life begins again to-day."

Hen-like Mercy soon learned this sally of her refractory duckling, and was uneasy. So, for an excuse to watch him, she brought him out his money and jewels, and told him she had thought it safest to take charge of them.

He thanked her cavalierly, and offered her a diamond ring.

She blushed scarlet, and declined it, and even turned a meekly reproachful glance on at him with her dove's eyes.

He had a suit of russet made, and put away his fine coat, and forbade any one to call him "your worship." "I am a farmer, like yourselves," said he; "and my name is — Thomas Leicester."

A brain fever either kills the unhappy lover, or else benumbs the very anguish that caused it.

And so it was with Griffith. His love got benumbed,

and the sense of his wrongs vivid. He nursed a bitter hatred of his wife, only, as he could not punish her without going near her, and no punishment short of death seemed enough for her, he set to work to obliterate her from his very memory, if possible. He tried employment: he pottered about the little farm, advising and helping, and that so zealously that the landlord retired altogether from that department, and Griffith, instead of he, became Mercy's ally, agricultural and bucolical. She was a shepherdess to the core, and hated the poor "Packhorse."

For all that, it was her fate to add to its attractions: for Griffith bought a viol da gambo, and taught her sweet songs, which he accompanied with such skill and sometimes with his voice, that good company often looked in on the chance of a good song sweetly sung and played.

The sick in body, or mind, are egotistical. Griffith was no exception: bent on curing his own deep wound, he never troubled his head about the wound he might inflict.

He was grateful to his sweet nurse, and told her so. And his gratitude charmed her all the more that it had been rather long in coming.

He found this dove-like creature a wonderful soother: he applied her more and more to his sore heart.

As for Mercy, she had been too good and kind to her patient not to take a tender interest in his convalescence. Our hearts warm more to those we have been kind to, than to those who have been kind to us: and the female reader can easily imagine what delicious feelings stole into that womanly heart, when she saw her pale nursling pick up health and strength under her wing, and become the finest, handsomest man in the parish.

Pity and admiration; where these meet, love is not far behind.

And then this man, who had been cross and rough while he was weak, became gentler, kinder, and more deferential to her, the stronger he got.

Mrs. Vint saw they were both fond of each other's company, and disapproved it. She told Paul Carrick, if he had any thought of Mercy he had better give over shilly-shallying, for there was another man after her. Paul made light of it at first. "She has known me too long to take up her head with a new-comer," said he. "To be sure I never asked her to name the day; but she knows my mind well enough, and I know hers."

"Then you know more than I do," said the mother ironically.

He thought over this conversation, and very wisely determined not to run unnecessary risks: he came up one afternoon, and hunted about for Mercy, till he found her milking a cow in the adjoining paddock.

"Well, lass," said he, "I've good news for thee. My old dad says we may have his house to live in. So now you and I can yoke next month, if ye will."

"Me turn the honest man out of his house!" said Mercy, mighty innocently.

"Who asks you? He nobbut bargains for the chimney corner: and you are not the girl to begrudge the old man that."

"Oh no, Paul. But what would father do if I were to leave *his* house? Methinks the farm would go to rack and ruin; he is so wrapped up in his nasty public."

"Why, he has got a helper, by all accounts: and if you talk like that, you will never wed at all."

"Never is a big word. But I'm too young to marry yet. Jenny, thou jade, stand still."

The attack and defence proceeded upon these terms for some time; and the defendant had one base advantage; and used it. Her forehead was wedged tight

against Jenny's ribs, and Paul could not see her face. This, and the feminine evasiveness of her replies, irritated him at last.

"Take thy head out o' the coow," said he roughly, "and answer straight. Is all our wooing to go for nought?"

"Wooing? You never said so much to me in all these years as you have to-day."

"Oh, ye knew my mind well enough. There's a many ways of showing the heart."

"Speaking out is the best, I trow."

"Why, what do I come here for twice a week, this two years past, if not for thee?"

"Ay, for me, and father's ale."

"And thou canst look at me, and tell me that? Ye false hard-hearted hussy. But, nay, thou wast never so: 'tis this Thomas Leicester hath bewitched thee, and set thee against thy true lover."

"Mr. Leicester pays no suit to me," said Mercy blushing: "he is a right civil-spoken gentleman, and you know you saved his life."

"The more fool I. I wish I had known he was going to rob me of my lass's heart, I'd have seen him die a hundred times ere I'd have interfered. But they say if you save a man's life he'll make you rue it. Mercy, my lass, you are well respected in the parish; take a thought now: better be a farrier's wife than a gentleman's mistress."

Mercy did take her head "out of the cow" at this, and, for once, her cheek burned with anger; but the unwonted sentiment died before it could find words, and she said quietly, "I need not be either, against my will."

Young Carrick made many such appeals to Mercy Vint; but he could never bring her to confess to him

that he and she had ever been more than friends, or were now anything less than friends. Still he forced her to own to herself, that, if she had never seen Thomas Leicester, her quiet affection and respect for Carrick would probably have carried her to the altar with him.

His remonstrances, sometimes angry, sometimes tearful, awoke her pity, which was the grand sentiment of her heart, and disturbed her peace.

Moreover, she studied the two men in her quiet, thoughtful way, and saw that Carrick loved her with all his honest, though hitherto tepid heart; but Griffith had depths, and could love with more passion than ever he had shown for her. "He is not the man to have a fever by reason of me," said the poor girl to herself. But I am afraid even this attracted her to Griffith; it nettled a woman's soft ambition; which is, to be as well loved as ever woman was.

And so things went on, and, as generally happens, the man who was losing ground went the very way to lose more. He spoke ill of Griffith behind his back: called him a highwayman, a gentleman, an ungrateful, undermining traitor. But Griffith never mentioned Carrick; and so when he and Mercy were together, her old follower was pleasingly obliterated, and affectionate good humor reigned. Thus Griffith, alias Thomas, became her sunbeam, and Paul her cloud.

But he who had disturbed the peace of others, his own turn came.

One day he found Mercy crying: he sat down beside her, and said kindly, "Why, sweetheart, what is amiss?"

"No great matter," said she; and turned her head away, but did not check her tears, for it was new and pleasant to be consoled by Thomas Leicester.

"Nay, but tell me, child."

"Well, then, Jessie Carrick has been at me; that is all."

"The vixen! what did she say?"

"Nay, I'm not pleased enow with it to repeat it. She did cast something in my teeth."

Griffith pressed her to be more explicit: she declined, with so many blushes, that his curiosity was awakened, and he told Mrs. Vint, with some heat, that Jess Carrick had been making Mercy cry.

"Like enow," said Mrs. Vint coolly. "She'll eat her victuals all one for that, please God."

"Else I'll wring the cock-nosed jade's neck, next time she comes here," replied Griffith; "but, dame, I want to know what she can have to say to Mercy to make her cry."

Mrs. Vint looked him steadily in the face for some time, and then and there decided to come to an explanation. "Ten to one 'tis about her brother," said she; "you know this Paul is our Mercy's sweetheart."

At these simple words Griffith winced, and his countenance changed remarkably. Mrs. Vint observed it, and was all the more resolved to have it out with him.

"Her sweetheart!" said Griffith. "Why, I have seen them together a dozen of times, and not a word of courtship."

"Oh, the young men don't make many speeches in these parts. They show their hearts by act."

"By act? why, I met them coming home from milking t'other evening. Mercy was carrying the pail, brimful: and that oaf sauntered by her side, with his hands in his pockets; was that the act of a lover?"

"I heard of it, sir," said Mrs. Vint, quietly; "and as how you took the pail from her, willy-nilly, and carried it home. Mercy was vexed about it; she told me you panted at the door, and she was a deal fitter to carry the

pail than you, that is just off a sick-bed, like. But lawk, sir, ye can't go by the likes of that; the bachelors here they'd see their sweethearts carry the roof into next parish on their backs, like a snail, and never put out a hand; 'tis not the custom hereaway. But, as I was saying, Paul and our Mercy kept company, after a manner; he never had the wit to flatter her as should be, nor the stomach to bid her name the day, and he'd buy the ring; but he talked to her about his sick beasts more than he did to any other girl in the parish, and she'd have ended by going to church with him; only you came and put a coolness atween 'em."

"I! How?"

"Well, sir, our Mercy is a kind-hearted lass, though I say it, and you were sick, and she did nurse you; and that was a beginning. And, to be sure, you are a fine personable man, and capital company; and you are always about the girl, and, bethink you, sir, she is flesh and blood like her neighbors; and they say, once a body has tasted venison steak, it spoils their stomach for oat porridge. Now that is Mercy's case, I'm thinking; not that she ever said as much to me; she is too reserved. But bless your heart, I'm forced to go about with eyes in my head, and watch 'em all a bit, me that keeps an inn."

Griffith groaned. "I'm a villain!" said he.

"Nay, nay," said Mrs. Vint. "Gentlefolks must be amused, cost what it may; but, hoping no offence, sir, the girl was a good friend to you in time of sickness; and so was this Paul, for that matter."

"She was," cried Griffith. "God bless her. How can I ever repay her?"

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Vint, "if that comes from your heart, you might take our Mercy apart, and tell her you like her very well, but not enough to marry a farmer's daughter, — don't say an innkeeper's daughter, or you'll

be sure to offend her; she is bitter against the 'Packhorse.' Says you, 'This Paul is an honest lad, turn your heart back to him.' And, with that, mount your black horse and ride away, and God speed you, sir; we shall often talk of you at the 'Packhorse,' and nought but good."

Griffith gave the woman his hand, and his breast labored visibly.

Jealousy was ingrained in the man. Mrs. Vint had pricked his conscience, but she had wounded his foible.

He was not in love with Mercy, but he esteemed her and liked her, and saw her value, and, above all, could not bear another man should have her.

Now this gave the matter a new turn. Mrs. Vint had overcome her dislike to him long ago, still he was not her favorite. But his giving her his hand with a gentle pressure, and his manifest agitation, rather won her; and, as uneducated women are your true weathercocks, she went about directly. "To be sure," said she, "our Mercy is too good for the likes of him; she is not like Harry and me; she has been well brought up by her Aunt Prudence, as was governess in a nobleman's house. She can read and write, and cast accounts; good at her sampler, and can churn and make cheeses, and play of the viol, and lead the psalm in church, and dance a minuet, she can, with any lady in the land. As to her nursing in time of sickness, that I leave to you, sir."

"She is an angel," cried Griffith, "and my benefactress; no man living is good enough for her." And he went away, visibly discomposed.

Mrs. Vint repeated this conversation to Mercy, and told her Thomas Leicester was certainly in love with her. "Shouldst have seen his face, girl, when I told him Paul and you were sweethearts. 'Twas as if I had run a knife in his heart."

Mercy murmured a few words of doubt; but she kissed her mother eloquently, and went about, rosy and beaming, all that afternoon.

As for Griffith, his gratitude and his jealousy were now at war, and caused him a severe mental struggle.

Carrick, too, was spurred by jealousy, and came every day to the house, and besieged Mercy; and Griffith, who saw them together, and did not hear Mercy's replies, was excited, irritated, alarmed.

Mrs. Vint saw his agitation, and determined to bring matters to a climax. She was always giving him a side thrust; and, at last, she told him plainly that he was not behaving like a man. "If the girl is not good enough for you, why make a fool of her, and set her against a good husband?" And when he replied she was good enough for any man in England, "Then," said she, "why not show your respect for her as Paul Carrick does? He likes her well enough to go to church with her."

With the horns of this dilemma she so gored Kate Peyton's husband that, at last, she and Paul Carrick, between them, drove him out of his conscience.

So he watched his opportunity and got Mercy alone; he took her hand and told her he loved her, and that she was his only comfort in the world, and he found he could not live without her.

At this she blushed and trembled a little, and leaned her brow upon his shoulder, and was a happy creature for a few moments.

So far, fluently enough; but then he began to falter and stammer, and say that for certain reasons, he could not marry at all. But if she could be content with anything short of that, he would retire with her into a distant country, and there, where nobody could contradict him, would call her his wife, and treat her as his wife, and pay his debt of gratitude to her by a life of devotion.

As he spoke, her brow retired an inch or two from his shoulder; but she heard him quietly out, and then drew back and confronted him, pale, but, to all appearance, calm.

"Call things by their right names," said she. "What you offer me this day, in my father's house, is to be your mistress. Then — God forgive you, Thomas Leicester."

With this oblique and feminine reply, and one look of unfathomable reproach from her soft eyes, she turned her back on him; but remembering her manners, courtesied at the door, and so retired; and unpretending Virtue lent her such true dignity, that he was struck dumb, and made no attempt to detain her.

I think her dignified composure did not last long when she was alone; at least, the next time he saw her, her eyes were red; his heart smote him, and he began to made excuses and beg her forgiveness. But she interrupted him. "Don't speak to me no more, if you please, sir," said she, civilly, but coldly.

Mercy, though so quiet and inoffensive, had depth and strength of character. She never told her mother what Thomas Leicester had proposed to her. Her honest pride kept her silent, for one thing. She would not have it known she had been insulted. And, besides that, she loved Thomas Leicester still, and could not expose or hurt him. Once there was an Israelite without guile, though you and I never saw him; and once there was a Saxon without bile, and her name was Mercy Vint. In this heart of gold the affections were stronger than the passions. She was deeply wounded, and showed it in a patient way to him who had wounded her, but to none other. Her conduct to him in public and private was truly singular, and would alone have stamped her a remarkable character. She declined all communication with him in private, and avoided him steadily and adroitly; but in public she spoke to him, sang with

him, when she was asked, and treated him much the same as before. He could see a subtle difference, but nobody else could.

This generosity, coupled with all she had done for him before, penetrated his heart and filled him with admiration and remorse. He yielded to Mrs. Vint's suggestions, and told her she was right; he would tear himself away, and never see the dear "Packhorse" again. "But, oh, dame," said he, "'tis a sorrowful thing to be alone in the world again, and nought to do. If I had but a farm, and a sweet little inn like this, perchance my heart would not be quite so heavy as 'tis this day at thoughts of parting from thee and thine."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Vint, "if that is all, there is the 'Vine' to let at this moment. 'Tis a better place of business than this; and some meadows go with it, and land to be had in the parish."

"I'll ride and see it," said Griffith, eagerly: then dejectedly, "but, alas! I have no heart to keep an inn without somebody to help me, and say a kind word now and then. Ah, Mercy Vint, thou hast spoiled me for living alone."

This vacillation exhausted Mrs. Vint's patience.

"What are ye sighing about, ye foolish man?" said she, contemptuously; "you have got it all your own way; if 'tis a wife ye want, ask Mercy, and don't take a nay: if ye would have a housekeeper, you need not want one long. I'll be bound there's plenty of young women where you came from as would be glad to keep the 'Vine' under you. And, if you come to that, our Mercy is a treasure on the farm, but she is no help in the inn, no more than a wax figure: she never brought us a shilling, till you came and made her sing to your bass viol. Nay, what you want is a smart handsome girl, with a quick eye and a ready tongue, and one as can

look a man in the face, and not given to love nor liquor. Don't you know never such a one ?"

"Not I. Humph, to be sure there is Caroline Ryder. She is handsome, and hath a good wit. She is a lady's maid."

"That's your woman, if she'll come. And to be sure she will; for to be mistress of an inn, that's a lady's maid's paradise."

"She would have come a few months ago, and gladly: I'll write to her."

"Better talk to her and persuade her."

"I'll do that too; but I must write to her first."

"So do then; but whatever you do, don't shilly-shally no longer. If wrestling was shilly-shallying, methinks you'd bear the bell, you or else Paul Carrick. Why, all this trouble comes on't. He might have wed our Mercy a year agone for the asking. Shilly-shally belongs to us that be women. 'Tis despisable in a man."

Thus driven on all sides, Griffith rode and inspected the "Vine" (it was only seven miles off): and after the usual chaffering, came to terms with the proprietor.

He fixed the day for his departure, and told Mrs. Vint he must ride into Cumberland first to get some money, and also to see about a housekeeper.

He made no secret of all this; and, indeed, was not without hopes Mercy would relent, or perhaps be jealous of this housekeeper. But the only visible effect was to make her look pale and sad: she avoided him in private as before.

Harry Vint was loud in his regrets, and Carrick openly exultant. Griffith wrote to Caroline Ryder, and addressed the letter in a feigned hand, and took it himself to the nearest post town.

The letter came to hand, and will appear in that sequence of events on which I am now about to enter.

CHAPTER XXVII.

If Griffith Gaunt suffered anguish, he inflicted agony.

Mrs. Gaunt was a high-spirited, proud, and sensitive woman; and he crushed her with foul words. Leonard was a delicate, vain, and sensitive man, accustomed to veneration. Imagine such a man hurled to the ground, and trampled upon.

Griffith should not have fled; he should have stayed and enjoyed his vengeance on these two persons. It might have cooled him a little had he stopped and seen the immediate consequences of his savage act.

The priest rose from the ground, pale as ashes, and trembling with fear and hate.

The lady was leaning, white as a sheet, against a tree, and holding it with her very nails for a little support.

They looked round at one another; a piteous glance of anguish and horror: then Mrs. Gaunt turned and flung her arm round so that the palm of her hand, high raised, confronted Leonard. I am thus particular, because it was a gesture grand and terrible as the occasion that called it forth: a gesture that *spoke*, and said, "Put the whole earth and sea between us forever after this."

The next moment she bent her head and rushed away, cowering and wringing her hands: she made for her house as naturally as a scared animal for its lair; but, ere she could reach it, she tottered under the shame, the distress, and the mere terror, and fell fainting with her fair forehead on the grass.

Caroline Ryder was crouched in the doorway, and did

not see her come out of the grove, but only heard a rustle, and then saw her proud mistress totter forward, and lie white, senseless, helpless at her very feet.

Ryder uttered a scream, but did not lose her presence of mind. She instantly kneeled over Mrs. Gaunt, and loosened her stays with quick and dexterous hand.

It was very like the hawk perched over and clawing the ringdove she has struck down.

But people with brains are never quite inhuman: a drop of lukewarm pity entered even Ryder's heart as she assisted her victim. She called no one to help her; for she saw something very serious had happened, and she felt sure Mrs. Gaunt would say something imprudent in that dangerous period when the patient recovers consciousness but has not all her wits about her. Now Ryder was equally determined to know her mistress's secrets, and not to share the knowledge with any other person.

It was a long swoon; and, when Mrs. Gaunt came to, the first thing she saw was Ryder leaning over her, with a face of much curiosity, and some concern.

In that moment of weakness the poor lady, who had been so roughly handled, saw a woman close to her, and being a little kind to her; so what did she do but throw her arms round Ryder's neck and burst out sobbing as if her heart would break!

Then that unprincipled woman shed a tear or two with her, half crocodile, half impulse.

Mrs. Gaunt not only cried on her servant's neck; she justified Ryder's forecast by speaking unguardedly: "I've been insulted — insulted — insulted!"

But, even while uttering these words, she was recovering her pride: so the first "insulted" seemed to come from a broken-hearted child, the second from an indignant lady, the third from a wounded queen.

No more words than this; but rose, with Ryder's assistance, and went, leaning on that faithful creature's shoulder, to her own bedroom. There she sunk into a chair, and said, in a voice to melt a stone, "My child! Bring me my little Rose."

Ryder ran and fetched the little girl; and Mrs. Gaunt held out both arms to her, angelically, and clasped her so passionately and piteously to her bosom, that Rose cried for fear, and never forgot the scene all her days: and Mrs. Ryder, who was secretly a mother, felt a genuine twinge of pity and remorse. Curiosity, however, was the dominant sentiment: she was impatient to get all these convulsions over, and learn what had actually passed between Mr. and Mrs. Gaunt.

She waited till her mistress appeared calmer: and then, in soft caressing tones, asked her what had happened.

"Never ask me that question again," cried Mrs. Gaunt, wildly: then, with inexpressible dignity, "My good girl, you have done all you could for me; now you must leave me alone with my daughter, and my God, who knows the truth."

Ryder courtesied and retired, burning with baffled curiosity.

Towards dusk Thomas Leicester came into the kitchen, and brought her news with a vengeance. He told her and the other maids that the squire had gone raving mad, and fled the country. "Oh, lasses," said he, "if you had seen the poor soul's face, a-riding headlong through the fair all one as if it was a ploughed field; 'twas white as your smocks: and his eyes glowering on t'other world. We shall ne'er see that face alive again."

And this was her doing.

It surprised and overpowered Ryder; she threw her apron over her head, and went off in hysterics, and be-

trayed her lawless attachment to every woman in the kitchen, she who was so clever at probing others.

This day of violent emotions was followed by a sullen and sorrowful gloom.

Mrs. Gaunt kept her bedroom, and admitted nobody; till, at last, the servants consulted together, and sent little Rose to knock at her door, with a basin of chocolate, while they watched on the stairs.

"It's only me, mamma," said Rose.

"Come in, my precious," said a trembling voice, and so Rose got in with her chocolate.

The next day she was sent for early: and at noon, Mrs. Gaunt and Rose came down-stairs; but their appearance startled the whole household.

The mother was dressed all in black, and so was her daughter, whom she led by the hand. Mrs. Gaunt's face was pale, and sad, and stern; a monument of deep suffering, and high-strung resolution.

It soon transpired that Griffith had left his home for good: and friends called on Mrs. Gaunt to slake their curiosity under the mask of sympathy.

Not one of them was admitted. No false excuses were made. "My mistress sees no one for the present," was the reply.

Curiosity, thus baffled, took up the pen; but was met with a short unvarying formula: "There is an unhappy misunderstanding between my husband and me. But I shall neither accuse him behind his back, nor justify myself."

Thus the proud lady carried herself before the world; but secretly she writhed. A wife abandoned is a woman insulted, and makes the wives that are not abandoned — cluck.

Ryder was dejected for a time, and, though not honestly penitent, suffered some remorse at the misera-

ble issue of her intrigues. But her elastic nature soon shook it off, and she felt a certain satisfaction at having reduced Mrs. Gaunt to her own level. This disarmed her hostility: she watched her as keenly as ever, but out of pure curiosity.

One thing puzzled her strangely. Leonard did not visit the house; nor could she even detect any communication between the parties.

At last, one day, her mistress told her to put on her hat, and go to Father Leonard.

Ryder's eyes sparkled; and she was soon equipped. Mrs. Gaunt put a parcel and a letter into her hands. Ryder no sooner got out of her sight than she proceeded to tamper with the letter. But to her just indignation she found it so ingeniously folded and sealed that she could not read a word.

The parcel, however, she easily undid, and it contained forty pounds in gold and small notes. "Oho! my lady," said Ryder.

She was received by Leonard with a tender emotion he in vain tried to conceal.

On reading the letter his features contracted sharply, and he seemed to suffer agony. He would not even open the parcel. "You will take that back," said he, bitterly.

"What, without a word?"

"Without a word. But I will write when I am able."

"Don't be long, sir," suggested Ryder. "I am sure my mistress is wearying for you. Consider, sir, she is all alone now."

"Not so much alone as I am," said the priest; "nor half so unfortunate."

And with this he leaned his head despairingly on his hand, and motioned to Ryder to leave him.

"Here's a couple of fools," said she to herself, as she went home.

That very evening Thomas Leicester caught her alone, and asked her to marry him.

She started at first, and then treated it as a jest.

"You come at the wrong time, young man," said she. "Marriage is put out of countenance. No, no, I will never marry, after what I have seen in this house."

Leicester would not take this for an answer, and pressed her hard.

"Thomas," said this plausible jade, "I like you very well; but I couldn't leave my mistress in her trouble. Time to talk of marrying when master comes here alive and well."

"Nay," said Leicester, "my only chance is while he is away: you care more for his little finger than for my whole body; that they all say."

"Who says?"

"Jane, and all the lasses."

"You simple man, they want you for themselves; that is why they belie me."

"Nay, nay; I saw how you carried on, when I brought word he was gone. You let your heart out for once. Don't take me for a fool: I see how 'tis: but I'll face it; for I worship the ground you walk on. Take a thought, my lass. What good can come of your setting your heart on *him?* I'm young, I'm healthy, and not ugly enough to set the dogs a-barking: I've got a good place; I love you dear; I'll cure you of that fancy, and make you as happy as the day is long. I'll try and make you as happy as you will make me, my beauty."

He was so earnest, and so much in love, that Mrs. Ryder pitied him, and wished her husband was in heaven.

"I am very sorry, Tom," said she, softly: "dear me, I did not think you cared so much for me as this. I must just tell you the truth. I have got one in my own

country, and I've promised him. I don't care to break my word: and, if I did, he is such a man, I am sure he would kill me for it. Indeed he has told me as much, more than once or twice."

"Killing is a game that two can play at."

"Ah! but 'tis an ugly game: and I'll have no hand in it. And — don't you be angry with me, Tom — I've known him longest, and — I love him best."

By pertinacity and variety in lying, she hit the mark at last. Tom swallowed this figment whole.

"That is but reason," said he. "I take my answer, and I wish ye both many happy days together, and well spent."

With this he retired, and blubbered a good hour in an out-house.

Tom avoided the castle, and fell into low spirits. He told his mother all, and she advised him to change the air. "You have been too long in one place," said she; "I hate being too long in one place myself."

This fired Tom's gypsy blood, and he said he would travel to-morrow, if he could but scrape together money enough to fill a peddler's pack.

He applied for a loan in several quarters, but was denied in all.

At last the poor fellow summoned courage to lay his case before Mrs. Gaunt.

Ryder's influence procured him an interview. She took him into the drawing-room, and bade him wait there. By-and-by a pale lady, all in black, glided into the room.

He pulled his front hair, and began to stammer something or other.

She interrupted him. "Ryder has told me," said she, softly. "I am sorry for you: and I will do what you require. And, to be sure, we need no gamekeeper here now."

She then gave him some money, and said she would look him up a few trifles besides, to put in his pack.

Tom's mother helped him to lay out this money to advantage, and one day he called at Hernshaw, pack and all, to bid farewell.

The servants all laid out something with him for luck: and Mrs. Gaunt sent for him, and gave him a gold thimble, and a pound of tea, and several yards of gold lace slightly tarnished, and a Queen Anne's guinea.

He thanked her heartily. "Ay, dame," said he, "you had alway an open hand, married or single. My heart is heavy at leaving you. But I miss the Squire's kindly face too. Hernshaw is not what it used to be."

Mrs. Gaunt turned her head aside, and the man could see his words had made her cry.

"My good Thomas," said she, at last, "you are going to travel the country: you might fall in with him."

"I might," said Leicester, incredulously.

"God grant you may: and, if ever you should, think of your poor mistress, and give him — this." She put her finger into her bosom and drew out a bullet wrapped in silver paper. "You will never lose this," said she. "I value it more than gold or silver. Oh, if ever you *should* see him, think of me and my daughter, and just put it in his hand without a word."

As he went out of the room Ryder intercepted him, and said, "Mayhap you will fall in with our master; if ever you do, tell him he is under a mistake, and the sooner he comes home the better."

Tom Leicester departed, and for days and weeks nothing occurred to break the sorrowful monotony of the place.

But the mourner had written to her old friend and confessor Francis; and after some delay, involuntary on his part, he came to see her.

They were often closeted together, and spoke so low that Ryder could not catch a word.

Francis also paid several visits to Leonard; and the final result of these visits was that the latter left England.

Francis remained at Hernshaw as long as he could, and it was Mrs. Gaunt's hourly prayer that Griffith might return while Francis was with her.

He did, at her earnest request, stay much longer than he had intended; but, at length, he was obliged to fix next Monday to return to his own place.

It was on Thursday he made this arrangement; but the very next day the postman brought a letter to the castle, thus addressed: —

To Mistress Caroline Ryder,
Living Servant with Griffith Gaunt, Esq.,
at his house, called Hernshaw Castle,
near Wigeonmoor,
in the county of Cumberland.
These with speed.

The address was in a feigned hand. Ryder opened it in the kitchen, and uttered a scream.

Instantly three female throats opened upon her with questions.

She looked them contemptuously in their faces, put the letter into her pocket, and, soon after, slipped away to her own room, and locked herself in while she read it. It ran thus: —

Good Mistress Ryder, — I am alive yet, by the blessing, though somewhat battered, being now risen from a fever, wherein I lost my wits for a time. And, on coming to myself, I found them making of my shroud; whereby you shall learn how near I was to death. And all this I owe to that false, perjured woman that was my wife, and is your mistress.

Know that I have donned russet and doffed gentility, for I find a heavy heart's best cure is occupation. I have taken a wayside inn, and think of renting a small farm, which two things go well together. Now you are, of all those I know, most fitted to manage the inn, and I the farm. You were always my good friend; and, if you be so still, then I charge you most solemnly that you utter no word to any living soul about this letter; but meet me privately where we can talk fully of these matters: for I will not set foot in Hernshaw Castle. Moreover, she told me once 'twas hers, and so be it. On Friday I shall lie at Stapleton, and the next day by an easy journey, to the place where I once was so happy.

So then at seven of the clock on Saturday evening, be the same wet or dry, prithee come to the gate of the grove unbeknown, and speak to

Your faithful friend and most unhappy master,

GRIFFITH GAUNT.

Be secret as the grave. Would I were in it.

This letter set Caroline Ryder in a tumult. Griffith alive and well, and set against his wife, and coming to her for assistance!

After the first agitation she read it again, and weighed every syllable. There was one book she had studied more than most of us: the heart. And she soon read Griffith's in this letter. It was no love letter, he really intended business: but, weak in health, and broken in spirit, and alone in the world, he naturally turned to one who had confessed an affection for him, and would therefore be true to his interests, and study his happiness.

The proposal was every way satisfactory to Mrs. Ryder. To be mistress of an inn, and have servants under her instead of being one herself. And then, if Griffith and she began as allies in business, she felt very sure she could make herself, first necessary to him, and then dear to him.

She was so elated, she could hardly contain herself:

and all her fellow-servants remarked that Mrs. Ryder had heard good news.

Saturday came, and never did hours seem to creep so slowly.

But at last the sun set, and the stars came out; there was no moon. Ryder opened the window and looked out; it was an admirable night for an assignation.

She washed her face again, put on her gray silk gown aud purple petticoat — *Mrs. Gaunt* had given them to her — and, at the last moment, went and made up her mistress's fire, and put out everything she thought could be wanted, and, five minutes after seven o'clock, tied a scarlet handkerchief over her head, and stepped out at the back-door.

What with her coal-black hair, so streaked with red, her black eyes flashing in the starlight, and her glowing cheeks, she looked bewitching.

And, thus armed for conquest, wily, yet impassioned, she stole out with noiseless foot and beating heart, to her appointment with her imprudent master.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The bill was paid; the black horse saddled and brought round to the door. Mr. and Mrs. Vint stood bareheaded to honor the parting guest; and the latter offered him the stirrup cup.

Griffith looked round for Mercy; she was nowhere to be seen.

Then he said, piteously, to Mrs. Vint, "What, not even bid me good-by?"

Mrs. Vint replied, in a very low voice, that there was no disrespect intended. "The truth is, sir, she could not trust herself to see you go; but she bade me give you a message. Says she, 'Mother, tell him I pray God to bless him, go where he will.'"

Something rose in Griffith's throat. "Oh, dame!" said he, "if she only knew the truth she would think better of me than she does. God bless her!"

And he rode sorrowfully away, alone in the world once more.

At the first turn in the road, he wheeled his horse, and took a last lingering look.

There was nothing vulgar nor inn-like in the "Pack-horse." It stood fifty yards from the road on a little rural green, and was picturesque itself. The front was entirely clad with large-leaved ivy. Shutters there were none; the windows, with their diamond panes, were lustrous squares, set like great eyes in the green ivy. It looked a pretty, peaceful retreat, and in it Griffith had found peace, and a dovelike friend.

He sighed, and rode away from the sight; not raging

and convulsed, as when he rode from Hernshaw Castle, but somewhat sick at heart and very heavy.

He paced so slowly that it took him a quarter of an hour to reach the "Woodman," a wayside inn not two miles distant. As he went by, a farmer hailed him from the porch and insisted on drinking with him, for he was very popular in the neighborhood. Whilst they were thus employed, who should come out but Paul Carrick, booted and spurred; and flushed in the face, and rather the worse for liquor imbibed on the spot.

"So you are going, are ye?" said he. "A good job, too." Then, turning to the other, "Master Gutteridge, never you save a man's life if you can anywise help it. I saved this one's: and what does he do but turn round and poison my sweetheart against me?"

"How can you say so?" remonstrated Griffith. "I never belied you. Your name scarce ever passed my lips."

"Don't tell me," said Carrick. "However, she has come to her senses, and given your worship the sack. Ride you into Cumberland, and I to the 'Packhorse,' and take my own again."

With this he unhooked his nag from the wall, and clattered off to the "Packhorse."

Griffith sat a moment stupefied, and then his face was convulsed by his ruling passion. He wheeled his horse, gave him the spur, and galloped after Carrick.

He soon came up with him, and yelled in his ear, "I'll teach you to spit your wormwood in my cup of sorrow."

Carrick shook his fist defiantly, and spurred his horse in turn.

It was an exciting race and a novel one; but soon decided. The great black hunter went ahead, and still improved his advantage. Carrick, purple with rage, was full a quarter of a mile behind, when Griffith dashed

furiously into the stable of the "Packhorse," and, leaving Black Dick panting and covered with foam, ran in search of Mercy.

The girl told him she was in the dairy: he looked in at the window, and there she was with her mother. With instinctive sense and fortitude she had fled to work. She was trying to churn; but it would not do: she had laid her shapely arm all across the churn, and her head on it, and was crying. Mrs. Vint was praising Carrick, and offering homely consolation.

"Ah, mother," sighed Mercy, "I could have made him happy. He does not know that; and he has turned his back on content. What will become of him now?"

Griffith heard no more: he went round to the front door, and rushed in.

"Take your own way, dame," said he, in great agitation. "Put up the banns when you like. Sweetheart, wilt wed with me? I'll make thee the best husband I can."

Mercy screamed faintly, and lifted up her hands; then she blushed and trembled to her very finger ends; but it ended in smiles of joy, and her brow upon his shoulder. In which attitude, with Mrs. Vint patting him approvingly on the back, they were surprised by Paul Carrick. He came to the door, and there stood aghast.

The young man stared ruefully at the picture, and then said very dryly, "I'm too late, methinks."

"That you be, Paul," said Mrs. Vint cheerfully. "She is meat for your master."

"Don't — you — never — come to me — to save your life — no more," blubbered Paul, breaking down all of a sudden.

He then retired, little heeded, and came no more to the "Packhorse" for several days.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It is desirable that improper marriages should never be solemnized: and the Christian Church saw this many hundred years ago, and ordained that before a marriage, the banns should be cried in a church three Sundays, and any person there present might forbid the union of the parties, and allege the just impediment.

This precaution was feeble, but not wholly inadequate — in the middle ages; for we know by good evidence that the priest was often interrupted and the banns forbidden.

But in modern days the banns are never forbidden: in other words, the precautionary measure that has come down to us from the thirteenth century is out of date and useless. It rests, indeed, on an estimate of publicity that has become childish. If persons about to marry were compelled to inscribe their names and descriptions in a *Matrimonial Weekly Gazette*, and a copy of this were placed on a desk in ten thousand churches, perhaps we might stop one lady per annum from marrying her husband's brother, and one gentleman from wedding his neighbor's wife. But the crying of banns in a single parish church is a waste of the people's time and the parson's breath.

And so it proved in Griffith Gaunt's case. The Rev. William Wentworth published, in the usual recitative, the banns of marriage between Thomas Leicester, of the parish of Marylebone in London, and Mercy Vint, spinster, of *this* parish; and creation, present *ex hypothesi mediævale*, but absent in fact, assented, by silence, to the union.

So Thomas Leicester wedded Mercy Vint, and took her home to the "Packhorse."

It would be well if those who stifle their consciences, and commit crimes, would set up a sort of medico-moral diary, and record their symptoms minutely day by day. Such records might help to clear away some vague, conventional notions.

To tell the truth, our hero, and now malefactor (the combination is of high antiquity), enjoyed for several months, the peace of mind that belongs of right to innocence; and his days passed in a state of smooth complacency. Mercy was a good, wise, and tender wife; she naturally looked up to him after marriage more than she did before: she studied his happiness as she had never studied her own: she mastered his character, admired his good qualities, discerned his weaknesses, but did not view them as defects; only as little traits to be watched, lest she should give pain to "her master," as she called him.

Affection in her took a more obsequious form than it could ever assume in Kate Peyton. And yet she had great influence, and softly governed "her master" for his good. She would come into the room and take away the bottle, if he was committing excess; but she had a way of doing it, so like a good but resolute mother, and so unlike a termagant, that he never resisted. Upon the whole, she nursed his mind, as in earlier days she had nursed his body.

And then she made him so comfortable; she observed him minutely to that end. As is the eye of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so Mercy Leicester's dove-like eye was ever watching "her master's" face, to learn the minutest features of his mind.

One evening he came in tired, and there was a black fire in the parlor. His countenance fell the sixteenth of

an inch. You and I, sir, should never have noticed it. But Mercy did, and, ever after, there was a clear fire when he came in.

She noted, too, that he loved to play the viol da gambo, but disliked the trouble of tuning it. So then she tuned it for him.

When he came home at night, early or late, he was sure to find a dry pair of shoes on the rug, his six-stringed viol tuned to a hair, a bright fire, and a brighter wife smiling and radiant at his coming, and always neat: for, said she, "Shall I don my bravery for strangers, and not for my Thomas, that is the best of company?"

They used to go to church, and come back together hand in hand like lovers: for the arm was rarely given in those days. And Griffith said to himself every Sunday, "What a comfort to have a Protestant wife!"

But one day he was off his guard, and called her "Kate, my dear."

"Who is Kate?" said she softly; but with a degree of trouble and intelligence that made him tremble.

"No matter," said he, all in a flutter: then, solemnly, "Whoever she was, she is dead; dead."

"Ah!" said Mercy, very tenderly and solemnly, and under her breath. "You loved her; yet she must die." She paused; then, in a tone so exquisite I can only call it an angel's whisper, "Poor Kate!"

Griffith groaned aloud. "For God's sake never mention that name to me again. Let me forget she ever lived. She was not the true friend to me that you have been."

Mercy replied softly, "Say not so, Thomas. You loved her well. Her death had all but cost me thine. Ah, well! we cannot all be the first. I am not very jealous, for my part; and I thank God for't. Thou art a dear good husband to me, and that is enow."

Paul Carrick, unable to break off his habits, came to the "Packhorse" now and then; but Mercy protected her husband's heart from pain. She was kind, and even pitiful; but so discreet and resolute, and contrived to draw the line so clearly between her husband and her old sweetheart, that Griffith's foible could not burn him for want of fuel.

And so passed several months, and the man's heart was at peace. He could not love Mercy passionately as he had loved Kate; but he was full of real regard and esteem for her; it was one of those gentle, clinging attachments that outlast grand passions, and survive till death; a tender, pure affection; though built upon a crime.

They had been married, and lived in sweet content, about three-quarters of a year — when trouble came; but in a vulgar form. A murrain carried off several of Harry Vint's cattle; and it then came out that he had purchased six of them on credit, and had been induced to set his hand to bills of exchange for them. His rent was also behind, and, in fact, his affairs were in a desperate condition.

He hid it as long as he could from them all; but, at last, being served with a process for debt, and threatened with a distress, and an execution, he called a family council and exposed the real state of things.

Mrs. Vint rated him soundly for keeping all this secret so long.

He whom they called Thomas Leicester remonstrated with him. "Had you told me in time," said he, "I had not paid forfeit for 'The Vine,' but settled there, and given you a home."

Mercy said never a word but "Poor father!"

As the peril drew nearer, the conversations became more animated and agitated, and soon the old people took to complaining of Thomas Leicester to his wife.

"Thou hast married a gentleman; and he hath not the heart to lift a hand to save thy folk from ruin."

"Say not so," pleaded Mercy; "to be sure he hath the heart, but not the means. 'Twas but yestreen he bade me sell his jewels for you. But, mother, I think they belonged to some one he loved; and she died. So, poor thing, how could I? Then, if you love me, blame me, and not him."

"Jewels, quotha! will they stop such a gap as ours?" was the contemptuous reply.

From complaining of him behind his back, the old people soon came to launching innuendoes obliquely at him. Here is one specimen out of a dozen.

"Wife, if our Mercy had wedded one of her own sort, mayhap he'd have helped us a bit."

"Ay, poor soul; and she so near her time; if the bailiffs come down on us next month 'tis my belief we shall lose her as well as house and home."

The false Thomas Leicester let them run on, in dogged silence; but every word was a stab.

And, one day, when he had been baited sore with hints, he turned round on them fiercely, and said, "Did I get you into this mess? It's all your own doing. Learn to see your own faults, and not be so hard on one that has been the best servant you ever had, gentleman or not."

Men can resist the remonstrances that wound them, and so irritate them, better than they can those gentle appeals that rouse no anger, but soften the whole heart. The old people stung him; but Mercy, without design, took a surer way. She never said a word; but sometimes, when the discussions were at their height, she turned her dove-like eyes on him, with a look so loving, so humbly inquiring, so timidly imploring, that his heart melted within him.

Ah, that is a true touch of nature, and genuine observation of the sexes, in the old song —

My feyther urged me sair;
My mither didna speak;
But she looked me in the face,
Till my hairt was like to break.

These silent, womanly, imploring looks of patient Mercy, were mightier than argument, or invective.

The man knew all along where to get money, and how to get it. He had only to go to Hernshaw Castle. But his very soul shuddered at the idea. However, for Mercy's sake, he took the first step; he compelled himself to look the thing in the face, and discuss it with himself. A few months ago he could not have done this, he loved his lawful wife too much; hated her too much. But now, Mercy and time had blunted both those passions; and he could ask himself whether he could not encounter Kate and her priest without any very violent emotion.

When they first set up house together, he had spent his whole fortune, a sum of two thousand pounds, on repairing and embellishing Hernshaw Castle and grounds. Since she had driven him out of the house, he had a clear right to have back the money; and now he resolved he would have it; only what he wanted was to get it without going to the place in person.

And now Mercy's figure, as well as her imploring looks, moved him greatly. She was in that condition which appeals to a man's humanity, and masculine pity, as well as to his affection. To use the homely words of Scripture, she was great with child; and, in that condition, moved slowly about him, filling his pipe, and laying his slippers, and ministering to all his little comforts; she would make no difference; and when he saw

the poor dove move about him so heavily, and rather languidly, yet so zealously and tenderly, the man's very bowels yearned over her, and he felt as if he could die to do her a service.

So, one day, when she was standing by him, bending over his little round table, and filling his pipe with her neat hand, he took her by the other hand and drew her gently on his knee, her burden and all.

"Child!" said he, "do not thou fret. I know how to get money; and I'll do't, for thy sake."

"I know that," said she, softly; "can I not read thy face by this time?" and so laid her cheek to his. "But, Thomas, for my sake, get it honestly; or not at all," said she, still filling his pipe, with her cheek to his.

"I'll but take back my own," said he; "fear nought."

But, after thus positively pledging himself to Mercy, he became thoughtful and rather fretful; for he was still most averse to go to Hernshaw, and yet could hit upon no other way; since to employ an agent would be to let out that he had committed bigamy; and so risk his own neck, and break Mercy's heart.

After all, his scale was turned by his foible.

Mrs. Vint had been weak enough to confide her trouble to a friend; it was all over the parish in three days.

Well, one day, in the kitchen of the inn, Paul Carrick, having drunk two pints of good ale, said to Vint, "Landlord, you ought to have married her to me. I've got two hundred pounds laid by. I'd have pulled you out of the mire, and welcome."

"Would you, though, Paul?" said Harry Vint; "then, by G——, I wish I had."

Now Carrick bawled that out, and Griffith, who was at the door, heard it.

He walked into the kitchen, ghastly pale, and spoke to Harry Vint first.

"I take your inn, your farm, and your debts, on me," said he; "not one without t'other."

"Spoke like a man!" cried the landlord, joyfully; "and so be it — before these witnesses."

Griffith turned on Carrick: "This house is mine. Get out on't, ye *jealous*, mischief-making cur." And he took him by the collar and dragged him furiously out of the place, and sent him whirling into the middle of the road; then ran back for his hat, and flung it out after him.

This done, he sat down boiling, and his eyes roved fiercely round the room in search of some other antagonist. But his strength was so great, and his face so altered with this sudden spasm of reviving jealousy, that nobody cared to provoke him farther.

After a while, however, Harry Vint muttered dryly, "There goes one good customer."

Griffith took him up sternly: "If your debts are to be mine, your trade shall be mine too, that you had not the head to conduct."

"So be it, son-in-law," said the old man; "only you go so fast; you do take possession afore you pays the fee."

Griffith winced. "That shall be the last of your taunts, old man." He turned to the ostler: "Bill, give Black Dick his oats at sunrise; and in ten days at farthest I'll pay every shilling this house and farm do owe. Now, Master White, you'll put in hand a new sign-board for this inn; a fresh 'Packhorse,' and paint him jet black, with one white hoof (instead of chocolate), in honor of my nag Dick; and in place of Harry Vint you'll put in Thomas Leicester. See that is done against I come back, or come *you* here no more."

Soon after this scene he retired to tell Mercy; and on his departure the suppressed tongues went like mill-clacks.

Dick came round saddled at peep of day; but Mercy had been up more than an hour, and prepared her man's

breakfast. She clung to him at parting, and cried a little, and whispered something in his ear, for nobody else to hear: it was an entreaty that he would not be long gone, lest he should be far from her in the hour of her peril.

Thereupon he promised her, and kissed her tenderly, and bade her be of good heart; and so rode away northwards with dogged resolution.

As soon as he was gone Mercy's tears flowed without restraint.

Her father set himself to console her. "Thy goodman," he said, "is but gone back to the high road for a night or two, to follow his trade of 'stand and deliver.' Fear nought, child, his pistols are well primed; I saw to that myself; and his horse is the fleetest in the county. You'll have him back in three days, and money in both pockets. I warrant you his is a better trade than mine, and he is a fool to change it."

Griffith was two days upon the road, and all that time he was turning over and discussing in his mind how he should conduct the disagreeable but necessary business he had undertaken.

He determined, at last, to make the visit one of business only. No heat, no reproaches. That lovely, hateful woman might continue to dishonor his name, for he had himself abandoned it. He would not deign to receive any money that was hers, but his own two thousand pounds he would have, and two or three hundred on the spot by way of instalment. And, with these hard views, he drew near to Hernshaw; but the nearer he got, the slower he went; for, what at a distance had seemed tolerably easy, began to get more and more difficult and repulsive. Moreover, his heart, which he thought he had steeled, began now to flutter a little, and somehow to shudder at the approaching interview.

CHAPTER XXX.

Caroline Ryder went to the gate of the grove and stayed there two hours; but, of course, no Griffith came.

She returned the next night and the next; and then she gave it up, and awaited an explanation. None came, and she was bitterly disappointed, and indignant.

She began to hate Griffith, and to conceive a certain respect, and even a tepid friendship, for the other woman he had insulted.

Another clew to this change of feeling is to be found in a word she let drop in talking to another servant. "My mistress," said she, "bears it *like a man.*"

In fact, Mrs. Gaunt's conduct at this period was truly noble.

She suffered months of torture, months of grief; but the high-spirited creature hid it from the world, and maintained a sad but high composure.

She wore her black, for she said, "How do I know he is alive?" She retrenched her establishment, reduced her expenses two-thirds, and busied herself in works of charity and religion.

Her desolate condition attracted a gentleman who had once loved her, and now esteemed and pitied her profoundly: Sir George Neville.

He was still unmarried, and she was the cause, — so far at least as this: she had put him out of conceit with the other ladies at that period when he had serious thoughts of marriage; and the inclination to marry at all had not since returned.

If the Gaunts had settled at Bolton, Sir George would

have been their near neighbor; but Neville's Court was nine miles from Hernshaw Castle; and when they met, which was not very often, Mrs. Gaunt was on her guard to give Griffith no shadow of uneasiness. She was therefore rather more dignified and distant with Sir George, than her own inclination and his merits would have prompted, for he was a superior and very agreeable man.

When it became quite certain that her husband had left her, Sir George rode up to Hernshaw Castle, and called upon her.

She begged to be excused from seeing him.

Now, Sir George was universally courted, and this rather nettled him; however, he soon learned that she received nobody except a few religious friends of her own sex.

Sir George then wrote her a letter that did him credit; it was full of worthy sentiment and good sense. For instance, he said he desired to intrude his friendly offices and his sympathy upon her, but nothing more. Time had cured him of those warmer feelings which had once ruffled his peace; but Time could not efface his tender esteem for the lady he had loved in his youth, nor his profound respect for her character.

Mrs. Gaunt wept over his gentle letter, and was on the verge of asking herself why she had chosen Griffith instead of this chevalier. She sent him a sweet, yet prudent reply; she did not encourage him to visit her; but said that if ever she should bring herself to receive visits from the gentlemen of the county during her husband's absence, he should be the first to know it. She signed herself his unhappy but deeply grateful servant and friend.

One day, as she came out of a poor woman's cottage, with a little basket on her arm, which she had emptied in the cottage, she met Sir George Neville full.

He took his hat off, and made her a profound bow. He was then about to ride on, but altered his mind, and dismounted to speak to her.

The interview was constrained at first; but ere long he ventured to tell her she really ought to consult with some old friend and practical man like himself. He would undertake to scour the country and find her husband, if he was above ground.

"Me go a-hunting the man," cried she, turning red; "not if he was my king as well as my husband. He knows where to find *me;* and that is enough."

"Well, but, madam, would you not like to learn where he is, and what he is doing?"

"Why, yes, my good, kind friend, I *should* like to know that." And having pronounced these words with apparent calmness, she burst out crying, and almost ran away from him.

Sir George looked sadly after her, and formed a worthy resolution. He saw there was but one road to her regard. He resolved to hunt her husband for her, without intruding on her, or giving her a voice in the matter. Sir George was a magistrate, and accustomed to organize inquiries. Spite of the length of time that had elapsed, he traced Griffith for a considerable distance; pending further inquiries, he sent Mrs. Gaunt word that the truant had not made for the sea, but had gone due south.

Mrs. Gaunt returned him her warm thanks for this scrap of information. So long as Griffith remained in the island there was always a hope he might return to her. The money he had taken would soon be exhausted, and poverty might drive him to her; and she was so far humbled by grief, that she could welcome him even on those terms.

Affliction tempers the proud. Mrs. Gaunt was deeply

injured as well as insulted; but, for all that, in her many days and weeks of solitude and sorrow, she took herself to task, and saw her fault. She became more gentle, more considerate of her servants' feelings, more womanly.

For many months she could not enter "the grove." The spirited woman's very flesh revolted at the sight of the place where she had been insulted and abandoned. But as she went deeper in religion, she forced herself to go to the gate and look in, and say out loud, "I gave the first offence," and then she would go in-doors again, quivering with the internal conflict.

Finally, being a Catholic, and therefore attaching more value to self-torture than we do, the poor soul made this very grove her place of penance. Once a week she had the fortitude to drag herself to the very spot where Griffith had denounced her; and there she would kneel and pray for him and for herself. And, certainly, if humility and self-abasement were qualities of the body, here was to be seen their picture; for her way was to set her crucifix up at the foot of a tree; then to bow herself all down, between kneeling and lying; and put her lips meekly to the foot of the crucifix, and so pray long and earnestly.

Now, one day, while she was thus crouching in prayer, a gentleman, booted, and spurred, and splashed, drew near, with hesitating steps. She was so absorbed, she did not hear those steps at all, till they were very near; but then she trembled all over; for her delicate ear recognized a manly tread she had not heard for many a day. She dared not move nor look, for she thought it was a mere sound, sent to her by Heaven to comfort her.

But the next moment a well-known mellow voice came like a thunder-clap, it shook her so.

"Forgive me, my good dame, but I desire to know" —

The question went no farther, for Kate Gaunt sprang to her feet, with a loud scream, and stood glaring at Griffith Gaunt, and he at her.

And thus husband and wife met again — met, by some strange caprice of Destiny, on the very spot where they had parted so horribly.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The gaze these two persons bent on one another may be half imagined; it can never be described.

Griffith spoke first. "In black!" said he, in a whisper.

His voice was low; his face, though pale and grim, had not the terrible aspect he wore at parting.

So she thought he had come back in an amicable spirit; and she flew to him with a cry of love, and threw her arm round his neck, and panted on his shoulder.

At this reception, and the tremulous contact of one he had loved so dearly, a strange shudder ran through his frame: a shudder that marked his present repugnance, yet indicated her latent power.

He himself felt he had betrayed some weakness; and it was all the worse for her: he caught her wrist and put her from him, not roughly, but with a look of horror. "The day is gone by for that, madam," he gasped. Then, sternly, "Think you I came here to play the credulous husband?"

Mrs. Gaunt drew back in her turn, and faltered out, "What! come back here, and not sorry for what you have done? not the least sorry? Oh, my heart! you have almost broken it."

"Prithee, no more of this," said Griffith sternly. "You and I are nought to one another now, and forever. But there, you are but a woman, and I did not come to quarrel with you." And he fixed his eyes on the ground.

"Thank God for that," faltered Mrs. Gaunt. "Oh, sir, the sight of you — the thought of what you were to

me once — till jealousy blinded you! Lend me your arm, if you are a man; my limbs do fail me."

The shock had been too much: a pallor overspread her lovely features, her knees knocked together, and she was tottering like some tender tree cut down, when Griffith, who, with all his faults, was a man, put out his strong arm, and she clung to it, quivering all over, and weeping hysterically.

That little hand, with its little feminine clutch, trembling on his arm, raised a certain male compassion for her piteous condition; and he bestowed a few cold, sad words of encouragement on her. "Come, come," said he gently; "I shall not trouble you long. I'm cured of my jealousy. 'Tis gone along with my love. You and your saintly sinner are safe from me. I am come hither for my own, my two thousand pounds, and for nothing more."

"Ah! you are come back for money, not for me?" she murmured, with forced calmness.

"For money; and not for you, of course," said he coldly.

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when the proud lady flung his arm from her. "Then money shall you have, and not me; nor aught of me but my contempt."

But she could not carry it off as heretofore. She turned her back haughtily on him; but, at the first step, she burst out crying. "Come, and I'll give you what you are come for," she sobbed. "Ungrateful! heartless! Oh, how little I knew this man!"

She crept away before him, drooping her head, and crying bitterly; and he followed her, hanging his head, and ill at ease; for there was such true passion in her voice, her streaming eyes, and indeed in her whole body, that he was moved, and the part he was playing revolted

him. He felt confused and troubled, and asked himself how on earth it was that she, the guilty one, contrived to appear the injured one, and make him, the wronged one, feel almost remorseful.

Mrs. Gaunt took no more notice of him now than if he had been a dog following at her heels. She went into the drawing-room, and sank helplessly on the nearest couch; threw her head wearily back, and shut her eyes. Yet the tears trickled through the closed lids.

Griffith caught up a hand-bell, and rang it vigorously.

Quick light steps were soon heard pattering; and in darted Caroline Ryder, with an anxious face; for of late she had conceived a certain sober regard for her mistress, who had ceased to be her successful rival, and who bore her grief *like a man.*

At sight of Griffith, Ryder screamed aloud, and stood panting.

Mrs. Gaunt opened her eyes. "Ay, child, he has come home," said she bitterly; "his body, but not his heart."

She stretched her hand out feebly, and pointed to a bottle of salts that stood on the table. Ryder ran and put them to her nostrils. Mrs. Gaunt whispered in her ear, "Send a swift horse for Father Francis; tell him, life or death!"

Ryder gave her a very intelligent look, and presently slipped out, and ran into the stable-yard.

At the gate she caught sight of Griffith's horse. What does the quick-witted creature do but send the groom off on that horse, and not on Mrs. Gaunt's.

"Now, dame," said Griffith doggedly, "are you better?"

"Ay, I thank you."

"Then listen to me. When you and I set up house together, I had two thousand pounds. I spent it on this

house. The house is yours. You told me so, one day, you know."

"Ah, you can remember my faults."

"I remember all, Kate."

"Thank you, at least, for calling me Kate. Well, Griffith, since you abandoned us, I thought, and thought, and thought, of all that might befall you; and I said, 'What will he do for money?' My jewels, that you did me the honor to take, would not last you long, I feared. So I reduced my expenses three-fourths at least, and I put by some money for your need."

Griffith looked amazed. "For my need?" said he.

"For whose else? I'll send for it, and place it in your hands — to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Why not to-day?"

"I have a favor to ask of you first."

"What is that?"

"Justice. If you are fond of money, I too have something I prize: my honor. You have belied and insulted me, sir; but I know you were under a delusion. I mean to remove that delusion, and make you see how little I am to blame: for, alas! I own I was imprudent. But, O Griffith! as I hope to be saved, it was the imprudence of innocence and over-confidence."

"Mistress," said Griffith, in a stern yet agitated voice, "be advised, and leave all this: rouse not a man's sleeping wrath. Let bygones be bygones."

Mrs. Gaunt rose, and said, faintly, "So be it. I must go, sir, and give some orders for your entertainment."

"Oh, don't put yourself about for me," said Griffith. "I am not the master of this house."

Mrs. Gaunt's lips trembled, but she was a match for him. "Then are you my guest," said she; "and my credit is concerned in your comfort."

She made him a courtesy, as if he were a stranger, and

marched to the door, concealing, with great pride and art, a certain trembling of her knees.

At the door she found Ryder, and bade her follow, much to that lady's disappointment; for she desired a *tête-à-tête* with Griffith, and an explanation.

As soon as the two women were out of Griffith's hearing, the mistress laid her hand on the servant's arm, and, giving way to her feelings, said, all in a flutter, "Child, if I have been a good mistress to thee, show it now. Help me keep him in the house till Father Francis comes."

"I undertake to do so much," said Ryder, firmly. "Leave it to me, mistress."

Mrs. Gaunt threw her arms round Ryder's neck, and kissed her.

It was done so ardently, and by a woman hitherto so dignified and proud, that Ryder was taken by surprise, and almost affected.

As for the service Mrs. Gaunt had asked of her, it suited her own designs.

"Mistress," said she, "be ruled by me; keep out of his way a bit, while I get Miss Rose ready. You understand."

"Ah! I have one true friend in the house," said poor Mrs. Gaunt. She then confided in Ryder, and went away to give her own orders for Griffith's reception.

Ryder found little Rose, dressed her to perfection, and told her her dear papa was come home. She then worked upon the child's mind in that subtle way known to women, so that Rose went down-stairs loaded and primed, though no distinct instructions had been given her.

As for Griffith, he walked up and down, uneasy; and wished he had stayed at the "Packhorse." He had not bargained for all these emotions; the peace of

mind he had enjoyed for some months seemed trickling away.

"Mercy, my dear," said he, to himself, "'twill be a dear penny to me, I doubt."

Then he went to the window, and looked at the lawn, and sighed. Then he sat down, and thought of the past.

Whilst he sat thus moody, the door opened very softly, and a little cherubic face, with blue eyes and golden hair, peeped in. Griffith started. "Ah!" cried Rose, with a joyful scream: and out flew her little arms, and away she came, half running, half dancing, and was on his knee in a moment, with her arms round his neck.

"Papa! papa!" she cried. "Oh, my dear, dear, dear, darling papa!" And she kissed and patted his cheek again and again.

Her innocent endearments moved him to tears. "My pretty angel!" he sighed: "my lamb!"

"How your heart beats: don't cry, dear papa. Nobody is dead: only we thought you were. I'm so glad you are come home alive. Now we can take off this nasty black: I hate it."

"What, 'tis for me you wear it, pretty one?"

"Ay. Mamma made us. Poor mamma has been so unhappy. And that reminds me: you are a wicked man, papa. But I love you all one for that. It *'tis* so dull when everybody is good like mamma; and she makes me dreadfully good too; but now you are come back, there will be a little, little wickedness again, it is to be hoped. Aren't you glad you are not dead, and are come home instead? I am."

"I am glad I have seen thee. Come, take my hand, and let us go look at the old place."

"Ay. But you must wait till I get on my new hat and feather."

"Nay, nay; art pretty enough bareheaded."

"Oh, papa! but I must, for decency. You are company now, you know."

"Dull company, sweetheart, thou'lt find me."

"I don't mean that: I mean, when you were here always, you were only papa; but now you come once in an age, you're COMPANY. I won't budge without 'em; so there now!"

"Well, little one, I do submit to thy hat and feather: only be quick; or I shall go forth without thee."

"If you dare," said Rose impetuously: "for I won't be half a moment."

She ran and extorted from Ryder the new hat and feather, which by rights she was not to have worn until next month.

Griffith and his little girl went all over the well-known premises, he sad and moody, she excited and chattering, and nodding her head down, and cocking her eye up every now and then, to get a glimpse of her feather.

"And don't you go away again, dear papa. It *'tis* so dull without you. Nobody comes here. Mamma won't let 'em."

"Nobody except Father Leonard," said Griffith, bitterly.

"Father Leonard? Why, he never comes here. Leonard! That is the beautiful priest that used to pat me on the head, and bid me love and honor my parents. And so I do. Only mamma is always crying, and you keep away: so how can I love and honor you, when I never see you, and they keep telling me you are good for nothing, and dead?"

"My young mistress, when did you see Father Leonard last?" said Griffith, gnawing his lip.

"How can I tell? Why, it was miles ago; when I was a mere girl. You know he went away before you did."

"I know nothing of the kind. Tell me the truth now. He has visited here since I went away?"

"Nay, papa."

"That is strange. She visits him, then?"

"What, mamma? She seldom stirs out; and never beyond the village. We keep no carriage now. Mamma is turned such a miser. She is afraid you will be poor; so she puts it all by for you. But now you are come, we shall have carriages and things again. Oh, by-the-by, Father Leonard! I heard them say he had left England, so I did."

"When was that?"

"Well, I think that was a little bit after you went away."

"That is strange," said Griffith, thoughtfully.

He led his little girl by the hand, but scarcely listened to her prattle; he was so surprised and puzzled by the information he had elicited from her.

Upon the whole, however, he concluded that his wife and the priest had perhaps been smitten with remorse, and had parted, — when it was too late.

This, and the peace of mind he had found elsewhere, somewhat softened his feelings towards them. "So," thought he, "they were not hardened creatures after all. Poor Kate!"

As these milder feelings gained on him, Rose suddenly uttered a joyful cry; and, looking up, he saw Mrs. Gaunt coming towards him, and Ryder behind her. Both were in gay colors, which, in fact, was what had so delighted Rose.

They came up, and Mrs. Gaunt seemed a changed woman. She looked young and beautiful, and bent a look of angelic affection on her daughter; and said to Griffith, "Is she not grown? Is she not lovely? Sure you will never desert her again."

"'Twas not her I deserted, but her mother; and she had played me false with her d——d priest," was Griffith's reply.

Mrs. Gaunt drew back with horror. "This, before my girl?" she cried. "GRIFFITH GAUNT, YOU LIE."

And this time it was the woman who menaced the man. She rose to six feet high, and advanced on him with her great gray eyes flashing flames at him. "Oh that I were a man!" she cried: "this insult should be the last. I'd lay you dead at her feet and mine."

Griffith actually drew back a step; for the wrath of such a woman was terrible; more terrible perhaps to a brave man than to a coward.

Then he put his hands in his pockets with a dogged air; and said, grinding his teeth: "But — as you are not a man, and I'm not a woman, we can't settle it that way. So I give you the last word, and good day. I'm sore in want of money; but I find I can't pay the price it is like to cost me. Farewell."

"Begone!" said Mrs. Gaunt: "and, this time, forever. Ruffian and fool, I loathe the sight of you."

Rose ran weeping to her. "Oh, mamma, don't quarrel with papa;" then back to Griffith, "Oh, papa, don't quarrel with mamma — for my sake."

Griffith hung his head, and said, in a broken voice: "No, my lamb, we twain must not quarrel before thee. We will part in silence, as becomes those that once were dear, and have thee to show for't. Madam, I wish you all health and happiness. Adieu."

He turned on his heel; and Mrs. Gaunt took Rose to her knees, and bent and wept over her. Niobe over her last was not more graceful, nor more sad.

As for Ryder, she stole quietly after her retiring master. She found him peering about, and asked him demurely what he was looking for.

"My good black horse, girl, to take me from this cursed place. Did I not tie him to yon gate?"

"The black horse? Why, I sent him for Father Francis. Nay, listen to me, master; you know I was always your friend, and hard upon *her*. Well, since you went, things have come to pass that make me doubt. I do begin to fear you were too hasty."

"Do you tell me this now, woman?" cried Griffith, furiously.

"How could I tell you before? Why did you break your tryst with me? If you had come according to your letter, I'd have told you months ago what I tell you now; but, as I was saying, the priest never came near her after you left; and she never stirred abroad to meet him. More than that, he has left England."

"Remorse! Too late."

"Perhaps it may, sir. I couldn't say; but there is one coming that knows the very truth."

"Who is that?"

"Father Francis. The moment you came, sir, I took it on me to send for him. You know the man: he won't tell a lie to please our dame. And he knows all: for Leonard has confessed to him. I listened and heard him say as much. Then, master, be advised, and get the truth from Father Francis."

Griffith trembled. "Francis is an honest man," said he; "I'll wait till he comes. But, oh, my lass, I find money may be bought too dear."

"Your chamber is ready, sir; and your clothes put out. Supper is ordered. Let me show you your room. We are all so happy now."

"Well," said he, listlessly, "since my horse is gone, and Francis coming, and I'm wearied and sick of the world, do what you will with me for this one day."

He followed her mechanically to a bedroom, where

was a bright fire, and a fine shirt, and his silver-laced suit of clothes airing.

A sense of luxurious comfort struck him at the sight.

"Ay," he said, "I'll dress, and so to supper; I'm main hungry. It seems a man must eat, let his heart be ever so sore."

Before she left him, Ryder asked him coldly why he had broken his appointment with her.

"That is too long a story to tell you now," said he, coolly.

"Another time then," said she; and went out smiling, but bitter at heart.

Griffith had a good wash, and enjoyed certain little conveniences which he had not at the "Packhorse." He doffed his riding-suit, and donned the magnificent dress Ryder had selected for him; and with his fine clothes he somehow put on more ceremonious manners.

He came down to the dining-room. To his surprise he found it illuminated with wax candles, and the table and sideboard gorgeous with plate.

Supper soon smoked upon the board; but, though it was set for three, nobody else appeared.

Griffith inquired of Ryder whether he was to sup alone.

She replied, "My mistress desires you not to wait for her. She has no stomach."

"Well, then, I have," said Griffith; and fell to with a will.

Ryder, who waited on this occasion, stood and eyed him with curiosity. His conduct was so unlike a woman's.

Just as he concluded, the door opened, and a burly form entered. Griffith rose and embraced him with his arms and lips, after the fashion of the day. "Welcome, thou one honest priest!" said he.

"Welcome, thrice welcome, my long-lost son!" said the cordial Francis.

"Sit down, man, and eat with me. I'll begin again, for you."

"Presently, squire; I've work to do first. Go thou and bid thy mistress to come hither to me."

Ryder, to whom this was addressed, went out, and left the gentlemen together.

Father Francis drew out of his pocket two packets, carefully tied and sealed. He took a knife from the table and cut the strings, and broke the seals. Griffith eyed him with curiosity.

Father Francis looked at him. "These," said he, very gravely, "are the letters that Brother Leonard hath written, at sundry times, to Catherine Gaunt, and these are the letters Catherine Gaunt hath written to Brother Leonard."

Griffith trembled, and his face was convulsed.

"Let me read them at once," said he: and stretched out his hand, with eyes like a dog's in the dark.

Francis withdrew them quietly. "Not till she is also present," said he.

At that, Griffith's good-nature, multiplied by a good supper, took the alarm. "Come, come, sir," said he, "have a little mercy. I know you are a just man, and, though a boon companion, most severe in all matters of morality. But, I tell you plainly, if you are going to drag this poor woman in the dirt, I shall go out of the room. What is the use tormenting her? I've told her my mind before her own child: and now I wish I had not. When I caught them in the grove I lifted my hand to strike her, and she never winced; I had better have left that alone too, methinks. D——n the women · you are always in the wrong if you treat 'em like men. They are not wicked; they are weak. And this one hath lain in my

bosom, and borne me two children, and one he lieth in the churchyard and t'other hath her hair and my very eyes: and the truth is, I can't bear any man on earth to miscall her but myself. God help me: I doubt I love her still too well to sit by and see her tortured. She was all in black for her fault, poor penitent wretch. Give me the letters; but let her be."

Francis was moved by this appeal, but shook his head solemnly; and, ere Griffith could renew his argument, the door was flung open by Ryder, and a stately figure sailed in that took both the gentlemen by surprise.

It was Mrs. Gaunt, in full dress. Rich brocade that swept the ground: magnificent bust, like Parian marble varnished; and on her brow a diadem of emeralds and diamonds that gave her beauty an imperial stamp.

She swept into the room as only fine women can sweep, made Griffith a haughty courtesy, and suddenly lowered her head, and received Father Francis's blessing: then seated herself, and quietly awaited events.

"The brazen jade!" thought Griffith. "But how divinely beautiful!" And he became as agitated as she was calm — in appearance. For, need I say, her calmness was put on? Defensive armor made for her by her pride and her sex.

The voice of Father Francis now rose, solid, grave, and too impressive to be interrupted.

"My daughter, and you who are her husband and my friend, I am here to do justice between you both, with God's help; and to show you both your faults.

"Catherine Gaunt, you began the mischief, by encouraging another man to interfere between you and your husband in things secular."

"But, father, he was my director, my priest."

"My daughter, do you believe, with the Protestants, that marriage is a mere civil contract; or do you hold, with us, that it is one of the holy sacraments?"

"Can you ask me?" murmured Kate, reproachfully.

"Well, then, those whom God and the whole Church have in holy sacrament united, what right hath a single priest to disunite in heart, and make the wife false to any part whatever of that most holy vow? I hear, and not from you, that Leonard did set you against your husband's friends, withdrew you from society, and sent him abroad alone. In one word, he robbed your husband of his companion and his friend. The sin was Leonard's, but the fault was yours. You were five years older than Leonard, and a woman of sense and experience; he but a boy by comparison. What right had you to surrender your understanding, in a matter of this kind, to a poor silly priest, fresh from his seminary, and as manifestly without a grain of common-sense as he was full of piety?"

This remonstrance produced rather a striking effect on both those who heard it. Mrs. Gaunt seemed much struck with it. She leaned back in her chair, and put her hand to her brow with a sort of despairing gesture that Griffith could not very well understand; it seemed to him so disproportionate.

It softened him, however, and he faltered out, "Ay, father, that is how it all began. Would to Heaven it had stopped there!"

Francis resumed. "This false step led to consequences you never dreamed of; for one of your romantic notions is, that a priest is an angel. I have known you, in former times, try to take me for an angel; then would I throw cold water on your folly by calling lustily for chines of beef and mugs of ale. But I suppose Leonard thought himself an angel too; and the upshot was, he fell in love with his neighbor's wife."

"And she with him," groaned Griffith.

"Not so," said Francis; "but perhaps she was nearer it than she thinks."

"Prove that," said Mrs. Gaunt, "and I'll fall on my knees to him before you."

Francis smiled, and proceeded. "To be sure, from the moment you discovered Leonard was in love with you, you drew back, and conducted yourself with prudence and propriety. Read these letters, sir, and tell me what you think of them."

He handed them to Griffith. Griffith's hand trembled visibly as he took them.

"Stay," said Father Francis; "your better way will be to read the whole correspondence according to their dates. Begin with this of Mrs. Gaunt's."

Griffith read the letter in an audible whisper.

Mrs. Gaunt turned her head a little, and for the first time lowered her eyes to the ground.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Dear Father and Friend, — The words you spoke to me to-day admit but one meaning; you are jealous of my husband.

Then you must be — how can I write it? — almost in love with me.

So then my poor husband was wiser than I. He saw a rival in you; and he has one.

I am deeply, deeply shocked. I ought to be very angry, too; but, thinking of your solitary condition, and all the good you have done to my soul, my heart has no place for aught but pity. Only, as I am in my senses, and you are not, you must now obey me, as heretofore I have obeyed you. You must seek another sphere of duty without delay.

These seem harsh words from me to you. You will live to see they are kind ones.

Write me one line, and no more, to say you will be ruled by me in this.

God and the saints have you in their holy keeping, So prays your affectionate and sorrowful daughter and true friend,

Catherine Gaunt.

"Poor soul!" said Griffith. "Said I not that women are not wicked, but weak? Who would think that after this he could get the better of her good resolves — the villain!"

"Now read his reply," said Father Francis.

"Ay," said Griffith. "So this is his one word of reply, is it? three pages closely writ — the villain, oh, the villain!"

"Read the villain's letter," said Francis, calmly.

The letter was very humble and pathetic; the reply of a good, though erring man, who owned that in a moment

of weakness, he had been betrayed into a feeling inconsistent with his holy profession. He begged his correspondent, however, not to judge him quite so hardly. He reminded her of his solitary life, his natural melancholy, and assured her that all men in his condition had moments when they envied those whose bosoms had partners. "Such a cry of anguish," said he, "was once rung from a maiden queen, maugre all her pride: 'The Queen of Scots hath a son; and I am but a barren stock.'" He went on to say that prayer and vigilance united do much. "Do not despair so soon of me. Flight is not cure; let me rather stay and, with God's help and the saints', overcome this unhappy weakness. If I fail, it will indeed be time for me to go, and never again see the angelic face of my daughter and my benefactress."

Griffith laid down the letter. He was somewhat softened by it, and said, gently, "I cannot understand it. This is not the letter of a thorough bad man neither."

"No," said Father Francis, coldly, "'tis the letter of a self-deceiver; and there is no more dangerous man, to himself and others, than your self-deceiver. But now let us see whether he can throw dust in her eyes, as well as his own." And he handed him Kate's reply.

The first word of it was, "You deceive yourself." The writer then insisted, quietly, that he owed it to himself, to her, and to her husband, whose happiness he was destroying, to leave the place at her request.

"Either you must go, or I," said she; "and pray let it be you. Also this place is unworthy of your high gifts; and I love you, in my way, the way I mean to love you when we meet again — in heaven; and I labor your advancement to a sphere more worthy of you."

I wish space permitted me to lay the whole correspondence before the reader; but I must confine myself to its general purport.

It proceeded in this way: the priest, humble, eloquent, pathetic, but gently, yet pertinaciously, clinging to the place; the lady, gentle, wise, and firm, detaching with her soft fingers, first one hand, then another, of the poor priest's, till at last he was driven to the sorry excuse that he had no money to travel with, nor place to go to.

"I can't understand it," said Griffith. "Are these letters all forged, or are there two Kate Gaunts? the one that wrote these prudent letters, and the one I caught upon this very priest's arm. Perdition!"

Mrs. Gaunt started to her feet. "Methinks 'tis time for me to leave the room," said she, scarlet.

"Gently, my good friends; one thing at time," said Francis. "Sit thou down, impetuous. The letters, sir, what think you of them?"

"I see no harm in them," said Griffith.

"No harm! is that all? But I say these are very remarkable letters, sir; and they show us that a woman may be innocent and unsuspicious, and so seem foolish, yet may be wise for all that. In her early communication with Leonard —

> 'At Wisdom's gate Suspicion slept;
> And thought no ill where no ill seemed.'

But, you see, suspicion being once aroused, wisdom was not to be lulled nor blinded. But that is not all: these letters breathe a spirit of Christian charity; of true and rare and exalted piety; tender are they, without passion; wise, yet not cold; full of conjugal love, and of filial piety for an erring father, whom she leads, for his good, with firm yet dutiful hand. Trust to my great experience; doubt the chastity of snow rather than hers who could write these pure and exquisite lines. My good friend, you heard me rebuke and sneer at this poor lady, for being too innocent and unsuspicious of man's frailty;

now hear me own to you that I could no more have written these angelic letters than a barn-door fowl could soar to the mansions of the saints in heaven."

This unexpected tribute took Mrs. Gaunt's heart by storm; she threw her arms round Father Francis's neck, and wept upon his shoulder.

"Ah!" she sobbed, "you are the only one left that loves me."

She could not understand justice praising her: it must be love.

"Ay," said Griffith, in a broken voice, "she writes like an angel: she speaks like an angel: she looks like an angel. My heart says she is an angel. But my eyes have shown me she is naught. I left her, unable to walk, by her way of it; I came back, and found her on that priest's arm, springing along like a greyhound." He buried his head in his hands, and groaned aloud.

Francis turned to Mrs. Gaunt, and said, a little severely, "How do you account for that?"

"I'll tell *you*, father," said Kate, "because you love me. I do not speak to *you*, sir: for you never loved me."

"I could give thee the lie," said Griffith, in a trembling voice; "but 'tis not worth while. Know, sir, that within twenty-fours after I caught her with that villain, I lay a-dying for her sake; and lost my wits; and, when I came to, they were a-making my shroud in the very room where I lay. No matter; no matter; I never loved her."

"Alas! poor soul!" sighed Kate: "would I had died ere I brought thee to that!" And, with this, they both began to cry at the same moment.

"Ay, poor fools," said Father Francis, softly; "neither of ye loved t'other; that is plain. So now sit you there, and let us have your explanation; for you must own appearances are strong against you."

Mrs. Gaunt drew her stool to Francis's knee, and addressing herself to him alone, explained as follows: —

"I saw Father Leonard was giving way, and only wanted one good push, after a manner. Well, you know, I had got him, by my friends, a good place in Ireland: and I had money by me for his journey; so, when my husband talked of going to the fair, I thought, 'Oh, if I could but get this settled to his mind before he comes back.' So I wrote a line to Leonard. You can read it if you like. 'Tis dated the 30th of September, I suppose."

"I will," said Francis: and read this out:-

DEAR FATHER AND FRIEND, — You have fought the good fight, and conquered, Now, therefore, I *will* see you once more, and thank you for my husband (he is so unhappy), and put the money for your journey into your hand myself; your journey to Ireland. You are the Duke of Leinster's chaplain; for I have accepted that place for you. Let me see you to-morrow in the grove, for a few minutes at high noon. God bless you. CATHERINE GAUNT.

"Well, father," said Mrs. Gaunt, "'tis true that I could only walk two or three times across the room. But, alack, you know what women are: excitement gives us strength. With thinking that our unhappiness was at an end; that, when he should come back from the fair, I should fling my arm round his neck, and tell him I had removed the cause of his misery, and so of mine, I seemed to have wings; and I did walk with Leonard, and talked with rapture of the good he was to do in Ireland, and how he was to be a mitred abbot one day (for he is a great man), and poor little me be proud of him; and how we were all to be happy together in heaven, where is no marrying nor giving in marriage. This was our discourse; and I was just putting the

purse into his hands, and bidding him God-speed, when he — for whom I fought against my woman's nature, and took this trying task upon me — broke in upon us, with a face of a fiend; trampled on the poor good priest that deserved veneration and consolation from him, of all men; and raised his hand to me; and was not man enough to kill me after all; but called me — ask him what he called me — see if he dares to say it again before you; and then ran away, like a coward as he is, from the lady he had defiled with his rude tongue, and the heart he had broken. Forgive him? that I never will; never; never."

"Who asked you to forgive him?" said the shrewd priest. "Your own heart. Come, look at him."

"Not I," said she irresolutely. Then, still more feebly: "He is nought to me." And so stole a look at him.

Griffith, pale as ashes, had his hand on his brow, and his eyes were fixed with horror and remorse.

"Something tells me she has spoken the truth," he said, in a quavering voice. Then, with concentrated horror, "But if so — O God, what have I done? — What shall I do?"

Mrs. Gaunt extended her arms towards him, across the priest.

"Why, fall at thy wife's knees, and ask her to forgive thee."

Griffith obeyed: he fell on his knees, and Mrs. Gaunt leaned her head on Francis's shoulder, and gave her hand across him to her remorse-stricken husband.

Neither spoke, nor desired to speak; and even Father Francis sat silent and enjoyed that sweet glow which sometimes blesses the peacemaker, even in this world of wrangles and jars.

But the good soul had ridden hard, and the neglected

meats emitted savory odors, and by-and-by he said dryly, "I wonder whether that fat pullet tastes as well as it smells: can you tell me, squire?"

"Oh, inhospitable wretch that I am," said Mrs. Gaunt: "I thought but of my own heart."

"And forgot the stomach of your unspiritual father. But, madam, you are pale, you tremble."

"'Tis nothing, sir: I shall soon be better. Sit you down and sup: I will return anon."

She retired, not to make a fuss; but her heart palpitated violently, and she had to sit down on the stairs.

Ryder, who was prowling about, found her there, and fetched her hartshorn.

Mrs. Gaunt got better; but felt so languid and also hysterical, that she retired to her own room for the night, attended by the faithful Ryder, to whom she confided that a reconciliation had taken place, and, to celebrate it, gave her a dress she had only worn a year. This does not sound queenly to you ladies; but know that a week's wear tells far more on the flimsy trash you wear nowadays, than a year did on the glorious silks of Lyons Mrs. Gaunt put on; thick as broadcloth, and embroidered so cunningly by the loom, that it would pass for rarest needle-work. Besides, in those days, silk was silk.

As Ryder left her, she asked, "Where is the master to lie to-night?"

Mrs. Gaunt was not pleased at this question being put to her. Being a singular mixture of frankness and finesse, she had retired to her own room partly to test Griffith's heart. If he was as sincere as she was, he would not be content with a *public* reconciliation.

But the question being put to her plump, and by one of her own sex, she colored faintly, and said, "Why, is there not a bed in his room?"

"Oh, yes, madam."

"Then see it be well aired. Put down all the things before the fire; and then tell me; I'll come and see. The feather bed, mind, as well as the sheets and blankets."

Ryder executed all this with zeal. She did more: though Griffith and Francis sat up very late, she sat up too; and, on the gentlemen leaving the supper-room, she met them both, with bed-candles, in a delightful cap, and undertook, with cordial smiles, to show them both their chambers.

"Tread softly on the landing, an if it please you, gentlemen. My mistress hath been unwell; but she is in a fine sleep now, by the blessing, and I would not have her disturbed."

Father Francis went to bed thoughtful. There was something about Griffith he did not like: the man every now and then broke out into boisterous raptures; and presently relapsed into moody thoughtfulness. Francis almost feared that his cure was only temporary.

In the morning, before he left, he drew Mrs. Gaunt aside, and told her his misgivings. She replied that she thought she knew what was amiss, and would soon set that right.

Griffith tossed and turned in his bed, and spent a stormy night. His mind was in a confused whirl, and his heart distracted. The wife he had loved so tenderly, proved to be the very reverse of all he had lately thought her! She was pure as snow, and had always loved him; loved him now, and only wanted a good excuse to take him to her arms again. But Mercy Vint! his wife, his benefactress! a woman as chaste as Kate, as strict in life and morals, — what was to become of her? How could he tell her she was not his wife? how reveal to her her own calamity, and his treason? and, on the other

hand, desert her without a word, and leave her hoping, fearing, pining, all her life! Affection, humanity, gratitude, alike forbade it.

He came down in the morning, pale for him, and worn with the inward struggle.

Naturally there was a restraint between him and Mrs. Gaunt, and only short sentences passed between them.

He saw the peacemaker off, and then wandered all over the premises, and the past came nearer, and the present seemed to retire into the background.

He wandered about like one in a dream, and was so self-absorbed that he did not see Mrs. Gaunt coming towards him with observant eyes.

She met him full; he started like a guilty thing.

"Are you afraid of me?" said she sweetly.

"No, my dear, not exactly; and yet I am: afraid, or ashamed, or both."

"You need not. I said I forgive you; and you know I am not one that does things by halves."

"You are an angel," said he warmly; "but (suddenly relapsing into despondency) we shall never be happy together again."

She sighed. "Say not so. Time and sweet recollections may heal even this wound by degrees."

"God grant it," said he despairingly.

"And, though we can't be lovers again all at once, we may be friends: to begin, tell me, what have you on your mind? Come, make a friend of me."

He looked at her in alarm.

She smiled. "Shall I guess?" said she.

"You will never guess," said he; "and I shall never have the heart to tell you."

"Let me try. Well, I think you have run in debt, and are afraid to ask me for the money."

Griffith was greatly relieved by this conjecture: he

drew a long breath, and, after a pause, said cunningly, "What made you think that?"

"Because you came here for money, and not for happiness. You told me so in the grove."

"That is true. What a sordid wretch you must think me!"

"No, because you were under a delusion. But I do believe you are just the man to turn reckless, when you thought me false, and go drinking and dicing." She added eagerly, "I do not suspect you of anything worse."

He assured her that was not the way of it.

"Then tell me the way of it. You must not think, because I pester you not with questions, I have no curiosity. Oh, how often have I longed to be a bird, and watch you day and night unseen! How would you have liked that? I wish you had been one, to watch me. Ah! you don't answer. Could you have borne so close an inspection, sir?"

Griffith shuddered at the idea; and his eyes fell before the full gray orbs of his wife.

"Well, never mind," said she, "tell me your story."

"Well, then, when I left you I was raving mad."

"That is true, I'll be sworn."

"I let my horse go; and he took me near a hundred miles from here, and stopped at — at — a farmhouse. The good people took me in."

"God bless them for it. I'll ride and thank them."

"Nay, nay: 'tis too far. There I fell sick of a fever, a brain-fever. The doctor blooded me."

"Alas! would he had taken mine instead."

"And I lost my wits for several days; and when I came back I was weak as water, and given up by the doctor; and the first thing I saw, was an old hag set a-making of my shroud."

Here the narrative was interrupted a moment by Mrs.

Gaunt seizing him convulsively, and then holding him tenderly, as if he was even now about to be taken from her.

"The good people nursed me, and so did their daughter, and I came back from the grave. I took an inn; but I gave up that, and had to pay forfeit; and so my money all went; but they kept me on. To be sure I helped on the farm: they kept a hostelry as well. By and by came that murrain among the cattle. Did you have it in these parts too?"

"I know not, nor care. Prithee, leave cattle, and talk of thyself."

"Well, in a word, they were ruined, and going to be sold up. I could not bear that: I became bondsman for the old man. It was the least I could do. Kate, they had saved thy husband's life."

"Not a word more, Griffith. How much stand you pledged for?"

"A large sum."

"Would five hundred pounds be of any avail?"

"Five hundred pounds! Ay, that it would, and to spare; but where can I get so much money? And the time so short."

"Give me thy hand, and come with me," said Mrs. Gaunt ardently.

She took his hand, and made a swift rush across the lawn. It was not exactly running, nor walking, but some grand motion she had when excited. She put him to his stride to keep up with her at all; and in two minutes she had him into her boudoir. She unlocked a bureau all in a hurry, and took out a bag of gold. "There!" she cried, thrusting it into his hand, and blooming all over with joy and eagerness: "I thought you would want money, so I saved it up. You shall not be in debt a day longer. Now mount thy horse, and carry it to those

good souls: only, for my sake, take the gardener with thee, — I have no groom now but he, — and both well armed."

"What! go this very day?"

"Ay, this very hour. I can bear thy absence for a day or two more: I have borne it so long; but I cannot bear thy plighted word to stand in doubt a day; no, not an hour. I am your wife, sir, your true and loving wife; your honor is mine, and is as dear to me now as it was when you saw me with Father Leonard in the grove, and read me all awry. Don't wait a moment, be gone at once."

"Nay, nay, if I go to-morrow I shall be in time."

"Ay, but," said Mrs. Gaunt very softly, "I am afraid if I keep you another hour I shall not have the heart to let you go at all; and the sooner gone, the sooner back for good, please God. There, give me one kiss, to live on, and begone this instant."

He covered her hands with kisses and tears. "I'm not worthy to kiss any higher than thy hand," he said; and so ran sobbing from her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

He went straight to the stable, and saddled Black Dick.

But, in the very act, his nature revolted. What, turn his back on her the moment he had got hold of her money, to take to the other? He could not do it.

He went back to her room, and came so suddenly that he caught her crying. He asked her what was the matter.

"Nothing," said she with a sigh: "only a woman's foolish misgivings. I was afraid perhaps you would not come back. Forgive me."

"No fear of that," said he. "However, I have taken a resolve not to go to-day. If I go to-morrow I shall be just in time; and Dick wants a good day's rest."

Mrs. Gaunt said nothing; but her expressive face was triumphant.

Griffith and she took a walk together; and he, who used to be the more genial of the two, was dull, and she full of animation.

This whole day she laid herself out to bewitch her husband, and put him in high spirits.

It was uphill work; but, when such a woman sets herself in earnest to delight a man, she reads our sex a lesson in the art, that shows us we are all babies at it.

However, it was at supper she finally conquered.

Here the lights, her beauty set off with art, her deepening eyes, her satin skin, her happy excitement, her wit and tenderness, and joyous sprightliness, enveloped Griffith in an atmosphere of delight, and drove every-

thing out of his head but herself; and with this, if the truth must be told, the sparkling wines co-operated.

Griffith plied the bottle a little too freely. But Mrs. Gaunt, on this one occasion, had not the heart to check him. The more he toasted her, the more uxorious he became, and she could not deny herself even this joy; but, besides, she had less of the prudent wife in her just then, than of the weak indulgent mother. Anything rather than check his love; she was greedy of it.

At last, however, she said to him, "Sweetheart, I shall go to bed; for I see, if I stay longer, I shall lead thee into a debauch. Be good now; drink no more when I am gone. Else I'll say thou lovest thy bottle more than thy wife."

He promised faithfully. But, when she was gone, modified his pledge by drinking just one bumper to her health; which bumper let in another; and, when at last he retired to rest, he was in that state of mental confusion wherein the limbs appear to have a memory independent of the mind.

In this condition do some men's hands wind up their watches, the mind taking no appreciable part in the ceremony.

By some such act of what physicians call "organic memory," Griffith's feet carried him to the chamber he had slept in a thousand times, and not into the one Mrs. Ryder had taken him to the night before.

The next morning he came down rather late for him, and found himself treated with a great access of respect by the servants.

His position was no longer doubtful; he was the master of the house.

Mrs. Gaunt followed in due course, and sat at breakfast with him, looking young and blooming as Hebe, and her eye never off him long.

She had lived temperately, and had not yet passed the age when happiness can restore a woman's beauty and brightness in a single day.

As for him, he was like a man in a heavenly dream; he floated in the past and the present; the recent and the future seemed obscure and distant, and comparatively in a mist.

But that same afternoon, after a most affectionate farewell, and many promises to return as soon as ever he had discharged his obligations, Griffith Gaunt started for the "Packhorse," to carry to Mercy Leicester, *alias* Vint, the money Catherine Gaunt had saved by self-denial and economy.

And he went south a worse man than he came.

When he left Mercy Leicester, he was a bigamist in law, but not at heart. Kate was dead to him; he had given her up forever; and was constant and true to his new wife.

But now he was false to Mercy, yet not true to Kate; and, curiously enough, it was a day or two passed with his lawful wife that had demoralized him. His unlawful wife had hitherto done nothing but improve his character.

But a great fault once committed is often the first link in a chain of acts, that look like crimes, but are, strictly speaking, consequences.

This man, blinded at first by his own foible, and, after that, the sport of circumstances, was single-hearted by nature; and his conscience was not hardened. He desired earnestly to free himself and both his wives from the cruel situation; but, to do this, one of them he saw must be abandoned entirely; and his heart bled for her.

A villain or a fool would have relished the situation; many men would have dallied with it; but, to do this

erring man justice, he writhed and sorrowed under it, and sincerely desired to end it.

And this was why he prized Kate's money so. It enabled him to render a great service to her he had injured worse than he had the other, to her he saw he must abandon.

But this was feeble comfort after all. He rode along a miserable man; none the less wretched and remorseful, that, ere he got into Lancashire, he saw his way clear. This was his resolve: to pay old Vint's debts with Kate's money; take the "Packhorse," get it made over to Mercy; give her the odd two hundred pounds and his jewels, and fly. He would never see her again; but would return home, and get the rest of the two thousand pounds from Kate, and send it Mercy by a friend, who should tell her he was dead, and had left word with his relations to send her all his substance.

At last the "Packhorse" came in sight. He drew rein, and had half a mind to turn back; but, instead of that, he crawled on, and very sick and cold he felt.

Many a man has marched to the scaffold with a less quaking heart than he to the "Packhorse."

His dejection contrasted strangely with the warm reception he met from everybody there. And the house was full of women; and they seemed, somehow, all cock-a-hoop, and filled with admiration of *him*.

"Where is she?" said he, faintly.

"Hark to the poor soul!" said a gossip. "Dame Vint, where's thy daughter? gone out a-walking belike?"

At this the other women present chuckled and clucked.

"I'll bring you to her," said Mrs. Vint; "but prithee be quiet and reasonable; for to be sure she is none too strong."

There was some little preparation, and then Griffith was ushered into Mercy's room, and found her in bed,

looking a little pale, but sweeter and comelier than ever. She had the bedclothes up to her chin.

"You look wan, my poor lass," said he; "what ails ye?"

"Nought ails me now thou art come," said she, lovingly.

Griffith put the bag on the table. "There," said he, "there's five hundred pounds in gold. I come not to thee empty-handed."

"Nor I to thee," said Mercy, with a heavenly smile. "See!"

And she threw down the bedclothes a little, and showed the face of a babe scarcely three days old; a little boy.

She turned in the bed, and tried to hold him up to his father, and said, "Here's *my* treasure for thee!" And the effort, the flush on her cheek, and the deep light in her dove-like eyes, told plainly that the poor soul thought she had contributed to their domestic wealth something far richer than Griffith had with his bag of gold.

The father uttered an ejaculation, and came to her side, and, for a moment, nature overpowered everything else. He kissed the child; he kissed Mercy again and again.

"Now God be praised for both," said he, passionately; "but most for thee, the best wife, the truest friend" — Here, thinking of her virtues, and the blow he had come to strike her, he broke down, and was almost choked with emotion; whereupon Mrs. Vint exerted female authority, and bundled him out of the room. "Is that the way to carry on at such a time?" said she. "'Twas enow to upset her altogether. Oh, but you men have little sense in women's matters. I looked to *you* to give her courage, not to set her off into hysterics after a manner. Nay, keep up her heart, or keep your distance, say I, that am her mother."

Griffith took this hint, and ever after took pity on Mercy's weak condition; and, suspending the fatal blow, did all he could to restore her to health and spirits.

Of course to do that, he must deceive her; and so his life became a lie.

For, hitherto, she had never looked forward much; but now her eyes were always diving into futurity: and she lay smiling and discussing the prospects of her boy; and Griffith had to sit by her side, and see her gnaw the boy's hand, and kiss his feet, and anticipate his brilliant career. He had to look and listen with an aching heart, and assent with feigned warmth, and an inward chill of horror and remorse.

One Drummond, a travelling artist, called; and Mercy, who had often refused to sit to him, consented now; for, she said, when he grows up he shall know how his parents looked in their youth, the very year their darling was born. So Griffith had to sit with her, and excellent likenesses the man produced; but a horrible one of the child. And Griffith thought, "Poor soul; a little while, and this picture will be all that shall be left to thee of me."

For, all this time he was actually transacting the preliminaries of separation. He got a man of law to make all sure. The farm, the stock, the furniture and goodwill of the "Packhorse," all these he got assigned to Mercy Leicester for her own use, in consideration of three hundred and fifty pounds, whereof three hundred were devoted to clearing the concern of its debts, the odd fifty was to sweeten the pill to Harry Vint.

When the deed came to be executed, Mercy was surprised, and uttered a gentle remonstrance. "What have I to do with it?" said she. "'Tis thy money, not mine."

"No matter," said Griffith: "I choose to have it so."

"Your will is my law," said Mercy.

"Besides," said Griffith, "the old folk will not feel so sore, nor be afraid of being turned out, if it is in thy name."

"And that is true," said Mercy. "Now who had thought of that, but my good man?" And she threw her arms lovingly round his neck, and gazed on him adoringly.

But his lion-like eyes avoided her dove-like eyes; and an involuntary shudder ran through him.

The habit of deceiving Mercy led to a consequence he had not anticipated. It tightened the chain that held him. She opened his eyes more and more to her deep affection, and he began to fear she would die if he abandoned her.

And then her present situation was so touching. She had borne him a lovely boy: that must be abandoned too, if he left her; and somehow the birth of this child had embellished the mother; a delicious pink had taken the place of her rustic bloom; and her beauty was more refined and delicate. So pure, so loving, so fair, so maternal, to wound her heart now, it seemed like stabbing an angel.

One day succeeded to another, and still Griffith had not the heart to carry out his resolve. He temporized; he wrote to Kate that he was detained by the business; and he stayed on and on, strengthening his gratitude and his affection, and weakening his love for the absent, and his resolution; till, at last, he became so distracted and divided in heart, and so demoralized, that he began to give up the idea of abandoning Mercy, and babbled to himself about fate and destiny, and decided that the most merciful course would be to deceive both women. Mercy was patient. Mercy was unsuspicious. She would content herself with occasional visits, if he could only feign some plausible tale to account for long absences.

Before he got into this mess he was a singularly truthful person; but now a lie was nothing to him. But, for that matter, many a man has been first made a liar by his connection with two women; and by degrees has carried his mendacity into other things.

However, though now blessed with mendacity, he was cursed with a lack of invention; and sorely puzzled how to live at Hernshaw, yet visit the "Packhorse."

The best thing he could hit upon was to pretend to turn bagman; and so Mercy would believe he was travelling all over England, when all the time he was quietly living at Hernshaw.

And perhaps these long separations might prepare her heart for a final parting, and so let in his original plan a few years hence.

He prepared this manœuvre with some art; he told her, one day, he had been to Lancaster, and there fallen in with a friend, who had as good as promised him the place of a commercial traveller for a mercantile house.

"A traveller!" said Mercy. "Heaven forbid! If you knew how I wearied for you when you went to Cumberland."

"To Cumberland! How know you I went thither?"

"Oh, I but guessed that; but now I know it, by your face. But go where thou wilt, the house is dull directly. Thou art our sunshine. Isn't he, my poppet?"

"Well, well; if it kept me too long from thee, I could give it up. But, child, we must think of young master. You could manage the inn, and your mother the farm, without me; and I should be earning money on my side. I want to make a gentleman of him."

"Anything for *him*," said Mercy, "anything in the world." But the tears stood in her eyes.

In furtherance of this deceit, Griffith did one day actually ride to Lancaster, and slept there. He wrote to

Kate, from that town, to say he was detained by a slight illness, but hoped to be home in a week: and the next day brought Mercy home some ribbons, and told her he had seen the merchant and his brother, and they had made him a very fair offer. "But I've a week to think of it," said he, "so there's no hurry."

Mercy fixed her eyes on him in a very peculiar way, and made no reply. You must know that something very curious had happened whilst Griffith was gone to Lancaster.

A travelling peddler, passing by, was struck with the name on the signboard. "Halloo!" said he, "why, here's a namesake of mine; I'll have a glass of his ale any way."

So he came into the public room, and called for a glass; taking care to open his pack and display his inviting wares. Harry Vint served him. "Here's your health," said the peddler. "You must drink with me, you must."

"And welcome," said the old man.

"Well," said the peddler, "I do travel five counties; but for all that you are the first namesake I have found. I am Thomas Leicester too, as sure as you are a living sinner."

The old man laughed, and said, "Then no namesake of mine are you; for they call me Harry Vint. Thomas Leicester, he that keeps this inn now, is my son-in-law: he is gone to Lancaster this morning."

The peddler said that was a pity, he should have liked to see his namesake, and drink a glass with him.

"Come again to-morrow," said Harry Vint, ironically. "Dame," he cried, "come hither. Here's another Thomas Leicester for ye, wants to see our one."

Mrs. Vint turned her head, and inspected the peddler from afar, as if he was some natural curiosity.

"Where do you come from, young man?" said she.

"Well, I came from Kendal last; but I am Cumberland born."

"Why, that is where t'other comes from," suggested Paul Carrick, who was once more a frequenter of the house.

"Like enow," said Mrs. Vint.

With that she dropped the matter as one of no consequence, and retired. But she went straight to Mercy, in the parlor, and told her there was a man in the kitchen that called himself Thomas Leicester.

"Well, mother?" said Mercy, with high indifference, for she was trying new socks on King Baby.

"He comes from Cumberland."

"Well, to he sure, names do run in counties."

"That is true; but seems to me, he favors your man: much of a height, and — There, do just step into the kitchen a moment."

"La, mother," said Mercy, "I don't desire to see any more Thomas Leicesters than my own: 'tis the man, not the name. Isn't it, my lamb?"

Mrs. Vint went back to the kitchen discomfited; but, with quiet pertinacity, she brought Thomas Leicester into the parlor, pack and all.

"There, Mercy," said she, "lay out a penny with thy husband's namesake."

Mercy did not reply, for, at that moment, Thomas Leicester caught sight of Griffith's portrait, and gave a sudden start, and a most extraordinary look besides.

Both the women's eyes happened to be upon him, and they saw at once that he knew the original.

"You know my husband?" said Mercy Vint, after a while.

"Not I," said Leicester, looking askant at the picture.

"Don't tell no lies," said Mrs. Vint. "You do know

him well." And she pointed her assertion by looking at the portrait.

"Oh, I know him whose picture hangs there, of course," said Leicester.

"Well, and that *is* her husband."

"Oh, that is her husband, is it?" And he was unaffectedly puzzled.

Mercy turned pale. "Yes, he is my husband," said she, "and this is our child. Can you tell me anything about him? for he came a stranger to these parts. Belike you are a kinsman of his?"

"So they say."

This reply puzzled both women.

"Anyway," said the peddler, "you see we are marked alike." And he showed a long black mole on his forehead. Mercy was now as curious as she had been indifferent. "Tell me all about him," said she: "how comes it that he is a gentleman and thou a peddler?"

"Well, because my mother was a gypsy, and his a gentlewoman."

"What brought him to these parts?"

"Trouble, they say."

"What trouble?"

"Nay, I know not." This after a slight but visible hesitation.

"But you have heard say."

"Well, I am always on the foot, and don't bide long enough in one place to learn all the gossip. But I do remember hearing he was gone to sea: and that was a lie, for he had settled here, and married you. I'fackins, he might have done worse. He has got a bonny buxom wife, and a rare fine boy, to be sure."

And now the peddler was on his guard, and determined he would not be the one to break up the household he saw before him, and afflict the dove-eyed wife and mother.

He was a good-natured fellow, and averse to make mischief with his own hands. Besides, he took for granted Griffith loved his new wife better than the old one; and above all, the punishment of bigamy was severe, and was it for him to get the squire indicted, and branded in the hand for a felon?

So the women could get nothing more out of him; he lied, evaded, shuffled, and feigned utter ignorance; pleading, adroitly enough, his vagrant life.

All this, however, aroused vague suspicions in Mrs. Vint's mind, and she went and whispered them to her favorite, Paul Carrick. "And, Paul," said she, "call for what you like, and score it to me; only treat this peddler till he leaks out summut: to be sure he'll tell a man more than he will us."

Paul entered with zeal into this commission: treated the peddler to a chop, and plied him well with the best ale.

All this failed to loose the peddler's tongue at the time, but it muddled his judgment: on resuming his journey, he gave his entertainer a wink. Carrick rose and followed him out.

"You seem a decent lad," said the peddler, "and a good-hearted one. Wilt do me a favor?"

Carrick said he would, if it lay in his power.

"Oh, it is easy enow," said the peddler. "'Tis just to give yon Thomas Leicester, into his own hand, this here trifle as soon as ever he comes home." And he handed Carrick a hard substance wrapped in paper. Carrick promised.

"Ay, ay, lad," said the peddler, "but see you play fair, and give it him unbeknown. Now don't you be so simple as show it to any of the women-folk. D'ye understand?"

"All right," said Carrick, knowingly. And so the boon companions for a day shook hands and parted.

And Carrick took the little parcel straight to Mrs. Vint, and told her every word the peddler had said.

And Mrs. Vint took the little parcel straight to Mercy, and told her what Carrick said the peddler had said.

And the peddler went off flushed with beer and self-complacency, for he thought he had drawn the line precisely; had faithfully discharged his promise to his lady and benefactress, but not so as to make mischief in another household.

Such was the power of ale — in the last century.

Mercy undid the paper and found the bullet, on which was engraved "I Love Kate."

As she read these words a knife seemed to enter her heart; the pang was so keen.

But she soon took herself to task. "Thou naughty woman," said she. "What! jealous of the dead?"

She wrapped the bullet up; put it carefully away; had a good cry; and was herself again.

But all this set her watching Griffith, and reading his face. She had subtle, vague misgivings; and forbade her mother to mention the peddler's visit to Griffith yet awhile. Woman-like, she preferred to worm out the truth.

On the evening of his return from Lancaster, as he was smoking his pipe, she quietly tested him. She fixed her eyes on him, and said, "One was here to-day that knows thee, and brought thee this." She then handed him the bullet, and watched his face.

Griffith undid the paper carelessly enough; but, at sight of the bullet, uttered a loud cry, and his eyes seemed ready to start out of his head.

He turned as pale as ashes, and stammered, piteously, "What? what? what d'ye mean? In Heaven's name, what is this? How? Who?"

Mercy was surprised, but also much concerned at his

distress, and tried to soothe him. She also asked him, piteously, whether she had done wrong to give it him. "God knows," said she, "'tis no business of mine to go and remind thee of her thou hast loved better, mayhap, than thou lovest me. But to keep it from thee, and she in her grave, oh, I had not the heart!"

But Griffith's agitation increased instead of diminishing; and, even while she was trying to soothe him, he rushed wildly out of the room, and into the open air.

Mercy went, in perplexity and distress, and told her mother.

Mrs. Vint, not being blinded by affection, thought the whole thing had a very ugly look, and said as much. She gave it as her opinion that this Kate was alive, and had sent the token herself, to make mischief between man and wife.

"That shall she never," said Mercy, stoutly; but now her suspicions were thoroughly excited, and her happiness disturbed.

The next day Griffith found her in tears: he asked her what was the matter. She would not tell him.

"You have your secrets," said she: "and so now I have mine."

Griffith became very uneasy.

For now Mercy was often in tears, and Mrs. Vint looked daggers at him.

All this was mysterious and unintelligible, and, to a guilty man, very alarming.

At last he implored Mercy to speak out. He wanted to know the worst.

Then Mercy did speak out. "You have deceived me," said she. "Kate is alive. This very morning, between sleeping and waking, you whispered her name; ay, false man, whispered it like a lover. You told me she was dead. But she is alive; and has sent you a reminder,

and the bare sight of it hath turned your heart her way again. What shall I do? Why did you marry me, if you could not forget her? I did not want you to desert any woman for me. The desire of my heart was always for your happiness. But, oh, Thomas, deceit and falsehood will not bring you happiness, no more than they will me. What shall I do? what shall I do?"

Her tears flowed freely, and Griffith sat down, and groaned with horror and remorse, beside her.

He had not the courage to tell her the horrible truth, that Kate was his wife, and she was not.

"Do not thou afflict thyself," he muttered. "Of course, with you putting that bullet in my hand so sudden, it set my fancy a-wandering back to other days."

"Ah!" said Mercy, "if it be no worse than that, there's little harm. But why did thy namesake start so at sight of thy picture?"

"My namesake!" cried Griffith, all aghast.

"Ay, he that brought thee that love-token; Thomas Leicester. Nay, for very shame, feign not ignorance of him; why, he hath thy very mole on his temple, and knew thy picture in a moment. He is thy half-brother, is he not?"

"I am a ruined man," cried Griffith, and sank into a chair without power of motion.

"God help me, what is all this?" cried Mercy. "Oh, Thomas, Thomas, I could forgive thee aught but deceit; for both our sakes speak out, and tell me the worst; no harm shall come near thee while I live."

"How can I tell thee? I am an unfortunate man. The world will call me a villain; yet I am not a villain at heart. But who will believe me? I have broken the law. Thee I could trust, but not thy folk; they never loved me. Mercy, for pity's sake, when was that Thomas Leicester here?"

"Four days ago."

"Which way went he?"

"I hear he told Paul he was going to Cumberland."

"If he gets there before me, I shall rot in jail."

"Now, Heaven forbid! Oh, Thomas, then mount and ride after him."

"I will, and this very moment."

He saddled Black Dick, and loaded his pistols for the journey; but, ere he went, a pale face looked out into the yard, and a finger beckoned. It was Mercy. She bade him follow her. She took him to her room, where their child was sleeping; and then she closed and even locked the door.

"No soul can hear us," said she; "now, look me in the face, and tell me God's truth. Who and what are you?"

Griffith shuddered at this exordium. He made no reply.

Mercy went to a box, and took out an old shirt of his; the one he wore when he first came to the "Packhorse." She brought it to him and showed him "G. G." embroidered on it with a woman's hair. (Ryder's.)

"Here are your initials," said she; "now leave useless falsehoods; be a man, and tell me your real name."

"My name is Griffith Gaunt."

Mercy, sick at heart, turned her head away; but she had the resolution to urge him on. "Go on," said she, in an agonized whisper; "if you believe in God, and a judgment to come, deceive me no more. The truth! I say, the truth!"

"So be it," said Griffith, desperately; "when I have told thee what a villain I am, I can die at thy feet, and then thou wilt forgive me."

"Who is Kate?" was all she replied.

"Kate is — MY WIFE.

"I thought her false; who could think any other,

appearances were so strong against her; others thought so beside me. I raised my hand to kill her; but she never winced. I trampled on him I believed her paramour. I fled, and soon I lay a-dying in this house for her sake. I told thee she was dead. Alas! I thought her dead to me. I went back to our house (it is her house), sore against the grain, to get money for thee and thine. Then she cleared herself, bright as the sun, and pure as snow. She was all in black for me; she had put by money, against I should come to my senses and need it. I told her I owed a debt in Lancashire, a debt of gratitude as well as money: and so I did. How have I repaid it? The poor soul forced five hundred pounds on me. I had much ado to keep her from bringing it hither with her own hands; oh, villain! villain! Then I thought to leave thee, and send thee word I was dead; and heap money on thee. Money! But how could I? Thou wast my benefactress, my more than wife. All the riches of the world can make no return to thee. What, what shall I do? Shall I fly with thee and thy child across the seas? Shall I go back to her? No, the best thing I can do is to take this good pistol and let the life out of my dishonorable carcass, and free two honest women from me by one resolute act."

In his despair he cocked the pistol; and, at a word from Mercy, this tale had ended.

But the poor woman, pale and trembling, tottered across the room, and took it out of his hand. "I would not harm thy body, nor thy soul," she gasped. "Let me draw my breath, and think."

She rocked herself to and fro in silence.

Griffith stood trembling like a criminal before his judge.

It was long ere she could speak, for anguish. Yet when she did speak, it was with a sort of deadly calm.

"Go tell the truth to *her*, as you have done to me; and, if she can forgive you, all the better for you. I can never forgive you, nor yet can harm you. My child, my child! Thy father is our ruin. Oh, begone, man! or the sight of you will kill us both."

At that he fell at her knees; kissed, and wept over her cold hand, and, in his pity and despair, offered to cross the seas with her and her child, and so repair the wrong he had done her.

"Tempt me not," she sobbed. "Go, leave me. None here shall ever know thy crime, but she whose heart thou hast broken, and ruined her good name."

He took her in his arms, in spite of her resistance, and kissed her passionately; but, for the first time, she shuddered at his embrace, and that gave him the power to leave her.

He rushed from her, all but distracted, and rode away to Cumberland; but not to tell the truth to Kate, if he could possibly help it.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

At this particular time, no man's presence was more desired in that county than Griffith Gaunt's.

And this I need not now be telling the reader, if I had related this story on the plan of a miscellaneous chronicle. But the affairs of the heart are so absorbing, that even in a narrative, they thrust aside important circumstances of a less moving kind.

I must therefore go back a step before I advance further. You must know that forty years before our Griffith Gaunt saw the light, another Griffith Gaunt was born in Cumberland: a younger son, and the family estate entailed; but a shrewd lad, who chose rather to hunt fortune elsewhere, than to live in miserable dependence on his elder brother. His godfather, a city merchant, encouraged him, and he left Cumberland. He went into commerce, and in twenty years became a wealthy man, so wealthy that he lived to look down on his brother's estate, which he had once thought opulence. His life was all prosperity, with a single exception; but that a bitter one. He laid out some of his funds in a fashionable and beautiful wife. He loved her before marriage; and, as she was always cold to him, he loved her more and more.

In the second year of their marriage she ran away from him, and no beggar in the streets of London was so miserable as the wealthy merchant.

It blighted the man, and left him a sore heart all his days. He never married again, and railed on all womankind for this one. He led a solitary life in London till

he was sixty-nine; and then, all of a sudden, nature, or accident, or both, changed his whole habits. Word came to him that the family estate, already deeply mortgaged, was for sale, and a farmer who had rented a principal farm on it, and held a heavy mortgage, had made the highest offer.

Old Griffith sent down Mr. Atkins, his solicitor, post haste, and snapped the estate out of that purchaser's hands.

When the lands and house had been duly conveyed to him, he came down, and his heart seemed to bud again, in the scenes of his childhood.

Finding the house small, and built in a valley instead of on rising ground, he got an army of bricklayers, and began to build a mansion with a rapidity unheard of in those parts; and he looked about for some one to inherit it.

The name of Gaunt had dwindled down to three since he left Cumberland, but a rich man never lacks relations. Featherstonhaughs, and Underhills, and even Smiths, poured in, with parish registers in their laps, and proved themselves Gauntesses; and flattered and carneyed the new head of the family.

Then the perverse old gentleman felt inclined to look elsewhere. He knew he had a namesake at the other side of the county, but this namesake did not come near him.

This independent Gaunt excited his curiosity and interest. He made inquiries, and heard that young Griffith had just quarrelled with his wife, and gone away in despair.

Griffith senior took for granted that the fault lay with Mrs. Gaunt, and wasted some good sympathy on Griffith junior.

On further inquiry he learned that the truant was

dependent on his wife. Then, argued the moneyed man, he would not run away from her, but that his wound was deep.

The consequence of all this was, that he made a will very favorable to his absent and injured (?) namesake. He left numerous bequests, but made Griffith his residuary legatee; and having settled this matter, urged on and superintended his workmen.

Alas! just as the roof was going on, a narrower house claimed him, and he made good the saying of the wise bard, —

> Tu secanda marmora
> Locas sub ipsum funus et sepulchri
> Immemor struis domos.

The heir of his own choosing could not be found to attend his funeral; and Mr. Atkins, his solicitor, a very worthy man, was really hurt at this. With the quiet bitterness of a displeased attorney, he merely sent Mrs. Gaunt word her husband inherited something under the will, and she would do well to produce him, or else furnish him (Atkins) with proof of his decease.

Mrs. Gaunt was offended by this cavalier note, and replied very like a woman, and very unlike business.

"I do not know where he is," said she, "nor whether he is alive or dead. Nor do I feel disposed to raise the hue and cry after him. But favor me with your address, and I shall let you know, should I hear anything about him."

Mr. Atkins was half annoyed, half amused, at this piece of indifference. It never occurred to him that it might be all put on.

He wrote back to say that the estate was large, and, owing to the terms of the will, could not be administered without Mr. Griffith Gaunt; and, in the interest of the

said Griffith Gaunt, and also of the other legatees, he really must advertise for him.

La Gaunt replied that he was very welcome to advertise for whomsoever he pleased.

Mr. Atkins was a very worthy man, but human. To tell the truth, he was himself one of the other legatees. He inherited (and, to be just, had well deserved) four thousand guineas, under the will, and could not legally touch it without Griffith Gaunt. This little circumstance spurred his professional zeal.

Mr. Atkins advertised for Griffith Gaunt in the London and Cumberland papers, and in the usual enticing form. He was to apply to Mr. Atkins, solicitor, of Gray's Inn, and he would hear of something greatly to his advantage.

These advertisements had not been out a fortnight, when Griffith came home, as I have related.

But Mr. Atkins had punished Mrs. Gaunt for her insouciance, by not informing her of the extent of her good fortune; so she merely told Griffith, casually, that old Griffith Gaunt had left him some money, and the solicitor, Mr. Atkins, could not get on without him. Even this information she did not vouchsafe until she had given him her five hundred pounds, for she grudged Atkins the pleasure of supplying her husband with money.

However, as soon as Griffith left her, she wrote to Mr. Atkins to say that her husband had come home in perfect health, thank God; had only stayed two days, but was to return in a week.

When ten days had elapsed, Atkins wrote to inquire.

She replied he had not yet returned; and this went on till Mr. Atkins showed considerable impatience.

As for Mrs. Gaunt, she made light of the matter to Mr. Atkins; but, in truth, this new mystery irritated her and pained her deeply.

In one respect she was more unhappy than she had been before he came back at all. Then she was alone, her door was closed to commentators. But now, on the strength of so happy a reconciliation, she had re-entered the world, and received visits from Sir George Neville and others; and, above all, had announced that Griffith would be back for good in a few days. So, now, his continued absence exposed her to sly questions from her own sex, to the interchange of glances between female visitors, as well as to the internal torture of doubt and suspense.

But what distracted her most, was the view Mrs. Ryder took of the matter.

That experienced lady had begun to suspect some other woman was at the bottom of Griffith's conduct; and her own love for Griffith was now soured; repeated disappointments and affronts, *spretæque injuria formæ*, had not quite extinguished it, but had mixed so much spite with it, that she was equally ready to kiss or to stab him.

So she took every opportunity to instil into her mistress, whose confidence she had won at last, that Griffith was false to her.

"That is the way with these men that are so ready to suspect others. Take my word for it, dame, he has carried your money to his leman. 'Tis still the honest woman that must bleed for some nasty trollop or other."

She enforced this theory by examples drawn from her own observations in families, and gave the very names; and drove Mrs. Gaunt almost mad with fear, anger, jealousy, and cruel suspense. She could not sleep, she could not eat; she was in a constant fever.

Yet before the world she battled it out bravely, and, indeed, none but Ryder knew the anguish of her spirit and her passionate wrath.

At last there came a most eventful day.

Mrs. Gaunt had summoned all her pride and fortitude, and invited certain ladies and gentlemen to dine and sup.

She was one of the true Spartan breed, and played the hostess as well as if her heart had been at ease. It was an age in which the host struggled fiercely to entertain the guests; and Mrs. Gaunt was taxing all her powers of pleasing in the dining-room, when an unexpected guest strolled into the kitchen. The peddler, Thomas Leicester.

Jane welcomed him cordially, and he was soon seated at a table, eating his share of the feast.

Presently Mrs. Ryder came down, dressed in her best, and looking handsomer than ever.

At sight of her Tom Leicester's affection revived; and he soon took occasion to whisper an inquiry whether she was still single.

"Ay," said she, "and like to be."

"Waiting for the master still? Mayhap I could cure you of that complaint. But least said is soonest mended."

This mysterious hint showed Ryder he had a secret burning his bosom. The sly hussy said nothing just then, but plied him with ale and flattery; and, when he whispered a request for a private meeting out of doors, she cast her eyes down, and assented.

And in that meeting she carried herself so adroitly, that he renewed his offer of marriage, and told her not to waste her fancy on a man who cared neither for her nor any other she in Cumberland.

"Prove that to me," said Ryder, cunningly, "and may be I'll take you at your word."

The bribe was not to be resisted. Tom revealed to her, under a solemn promise of secrecy, that the squire had got a wife and child in Lancashire; and had a farm

and an inn, which latter he kept under the name of — Thomas Leicester.

In short, he told her, in his way, all the particulars I have told in mine.

She led him on with a voice of very velvet. He did not see how her cheek paled and her eyes flashed jealous fury.

When she had sucked him dry, she suddenly turned on him, with a cold voice, and said, "I can't stay any longer with you just now. She will want me."

"You will meet me here again, lass?" said Tom, ruefully.

"Yes, for a minute, after supper."

She then left him and went to Mrs. Gaunt's room, and sat crouching before the fire, all hate and bitterness.

What? he had left the wife he loved, and yet had not turned to her!

She sat there, waiting for Mrs. Gaunt, and nursing her vindictive fury, two mortal hours.

At last, just before supper, Mrs. Gaunt came up to her room, to cool her fevered hands and brow, and found this creature crouched by her fire, all in a heap, with pale cheek, and black eyes that glittered like basilisk's.

"What is the matter, child?" said Mrs. Gaunt. "Good heavens! what hath happened?"

"Dame!" said Ryder sternly, "I have got news of him."

"News of *him?*" faltered Mrs. Gaunt. "Bad news?"

"I don't know whether to tell you or not," said Ryder sulkily, but with a touch of human feeling.

"What cannot I bear? What have I not borne? Tell me the truth."

The words were stout, but she trembled all over in uttering them.

"Well, it is as I said; only worse. Dame, he has got

a wife and child in another county; and no doubt been deceiving her, as he has *us*."

"A wife!" gasped Mrs. Gaunt, and one white hand clutched her bosom, and the other the mantelpiece.

"Ay, Thomas Leicester, that is in the kitchen now, saw her, and saw his picture hanging aside hers on the wall. And he goes by the name of Thomas Leicester: and that was what made Tom go into the inn, seeing his own name on the sign-board. Nay, dame, never give way like that, lean on me; so. He is a villain, a false, jealous, double-faced villain."

Mrs. Gaunt's head fell on Ryder's shoulder, and she said no word; but only moaned and moaned, and her white teeth clicked convulsively together.

Ryder wept over her sad state: the tears were half impulse, half crocodile.

She applied hartshorn to the sufferer's nostrils, and tried to rouse her mind by exciting her anger. But all was in vain. There hung the betrayed wife, pale, crushed, and quivering under the cruel blow.

Ryder asked her if she should go down and excuse her to her guests.

She nodded a feeble assent.

Ryder then laid her down on the bed with her head low, and was just about to leave her on that errand, when hurried steps were heard outside the door, and one of the female servants knocked; and, not waiting to be invited, put her head in, and cried, "Oh, dame, the master is come home. He is in the kitchen."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Mrs. Ryder made an agitated motion with her hand, and gave the girl such a look withal, that she retired precipitately.

But Mrs. Gaunt had caught the words, and they literally transformed her. She sprang off the bed, and stood erect, and looked a Saxon Pythoness: golden hair streaming down her back, and gray eyes gleaming with fury.

She caught up a little ivory-handled knife, and held it above her head.

"I'll drive this into his heart before them all," she cried, "and tell them the reason *afterwards!*"

Ryder looked at her for a moment in utter terror. She saw a woman with grander passions than herself: a woman that looked quite capable of executing her sanguinary threat. Ryder made no more ado, but slipped out directly to prevent a meeting that might be attended with such terrible consequences.

She found her master in the kitchen, splashed with mud, drinking a horn of ale after his ride, and looking rather troubled and anxious; and, by the keen eye of her sex, she saw that the female servants were also in considerable anxiety. The fact is, they had just extemporized a lie.

Tom Leicester, being near the kitchen window, had seen Griffith ride into the courtyard.

At sight of that well-known figure, he drew back, and his heart quaked at his own imprudence, in confiding Griffith's secret to Caroline Ryder.

"Lasses," said he hastily, "do me a kindness for old

acquaintance. Here's the squire. For Heaven's sake don't let him know I am in the house, or there will be bloodshed between us; he is a hasty man, and I'm another. I'll tell ye more by and by."

The next moment Griffith's tread was heard approaching the very door, and Leicester darted into the housekeeper's room, and hid in a cupboard there.

Griffith opened the kitchen door, and stood upon the threshold.

The women courtesied to him, and were loud in welcome.

He returned their civilities briefly; and then his first word was, "Hath Thomas Leicester been here?"

You know how servants stick together against their master. The girls looked him in the face, like candid doves, and told him Leicester had not been that way for six months or more.

"Why, I have tracked him to within two miles," said Griffith, doubtfully.

"Then he is sure to come here," said Jane, adroitly. "He wouldn't ever think to go by us."

"The moment he enters the house, you let me know. He is a mischief-making loon."

He then asked for a horn of ale; and, as he finished it, Ryder came in, and he turned to her, and asked her after her mistress.

"She is well, just now," said Ryder; "but she has been took with a spasm: and it would be well, sir, if you could dress, and entertain the company in her place awhile. For I must tell you your being so long away hath set their tongues going, and almost broken my lady's heart."

Griffith sighed, and said he could not help it, and now he was here, he would do all in his power to please her. "I'll go to her at once," said he.

"No, sir!" said Ryder, firmly. "Come with me. I want to speak to you."

She took him to his bachelor's room, and stayed a few minutes to talk to him.

"Master," said she solemnly, "things are very serious here. Why did you stay so long away? Our dame says some woman is at the bottom of it, and she'll put a knife into you if you come a-nigh her."

This threat did not appall Griffith, as Ryder expected. Indeed, he seemed rather flattered.

"Poor Kate!" said he, "she is just the woman to do it. But I am afraid she does not love me enough for that. But indeed how should she?"

"Well, sir," replied Ryder, "oblige me by keeping clear of her for a little while. I have got orders to make your bed here. Now, dress, like a good soul, and then go down and show respect to the company that is in your house; for they know you are here."

"Why, that is the least I can do," said Griffith. "Put you out what I am to wear, and then run and say I'll be with them anon."

Griffith walked into the dining-room, and, somewhat to his surprise, after what Ryder had said, found Mrs. Gaunt seated at the head of her own table, and presiding like a radiant queen over a brilliant assembly.

He walked in, and made a low bow to his guests first: then he approached, to greet his wife more freely; but she drew back decidedly, and made him a courtesy, the dignity and distance of which struck the whole company.

Sir George Neville, who was at the bottom of the table, proposed, with his usual courtesy, to resign his place to Griffith. But Mrs. Gaunt forbade the arrangement.

"No, Sir George," said she, "this is but an occasional visitor: you are my constant friend."

If this had been said pleasantly, well and good; but

the guests looked in vain into their hostess's face for the smile that ought to have accompanied so strange a speech and disarmed it.

"Rarities are the more welcome," said a lady, coming to the rescue; and edged aside to make room for him.

"Madam," said Griffith, "I am in your debt for that explanation; but I hope you will be no rarity here, for all that."

Supper proceeded; but the mirth languished. Somehow or other, the chill fact that there was a grave quarrel between two at the table, and those two man and wife, insinuated itself into the spirits of the guests.

There began to be lulls: fatal lulls. And in one of these, some unlucky voice was heard to murmur, "Such a meeting of man and wife, I never saw."

The hearers felt miserable at this personality, that fell upon the ear of silence like a thunderbolt.

Griffith was ill-advised enough to notice the remark, though clearly not intended for his ears. For one thing, his jealousy had actually revived at the cool preference Kate had shown his old rival, Neville.

"Oh!" said he, bitterly, "a man is not always his wife's favorite."

"He does not always deserve to be," said Mrs. Gaunt, sternly.

When matters had gone that length, one idea seemed to occur pretty simultaneously to all the well-bred guests; and that idea was, *Sauve qui peut.*

Mrs. Gaunt took leave of them, one by one, and husband and wife were left alone.

Mrs. Gaunt by this time was alarmed at the violence of her own passions, and wished to avoid Griffith for that night, at all events. So she cast one terribly stern look upon him, and was about to retire in grim silence. But he, indignant at the public affront she had put on him,

and not aware of the true cause, unfortunately detained her. He said, sulkily, "What sort of a reception was that you gave me?"

This was too much. She turned on him furiously. "Too good for thee, thou heartless creature! Thomas Leicester is here, and I know thee for a villain."

"You know nothing," cried Griffith. "Would you believe that mischief-making knave? What has he told you?"

"Go back to *her!*" cried Mrs. Gaunt furiously. "Me you can deceive and pillage no more. So, this was your jealousy! False and forsworn yourself, you dared to suspect and insult me. Ah! and you think I am the woman to endure this? I'll have your life for it! I'll have your life."

Griffith endeavored to soften her; protested that, notwithstanding appearances, he had never loved but her.

"I'll soon be rid of you, and your love," said the raging woman. "The constables shall come for you to-morrow. You have seen how I can love, you shall know how I can hate."

She then, in her fury, poured out a torrent of reproaches and threats that made his blood run cold. He could not answer her: he *had* suspected her wrongfully, and been false to her himself. He *had* abused her generosity, and taken her money for Mercy Vint.

After one or two vain efforts to check the torrent, he sank into a chair, and hid his face in his hands.

But this did not disarm her, at the time. Her raging voice and raging words were heard by the very servants, long after he had ceased to defend himself.

At last she came out, pale with fury, and finding Ryder near the door, shrieked out, "Take that reptile to his den, if he is mean enough to lie in this house:" then, lowering her voice, "and bring Thomas Leicester to me."

Ryder went to Leicester, and told him. But he objected to come. "You have betrayed me," said he. "Curse my weak heart, and my loose tongue. I have done the poor squire an ill turn. I can never look him in the face again. But 'tis all thy fault, double-face. I hate the sight of thee."

At this Ryder shed some crocodile tears; and very soon, by her blandishments, obtained forgiveness.

And Leicester, since the mischief was done, was persuaded to see the dame, who was his recent benefactor, you know. He bargained, however, that the squire should be got to bed first, for he had a great dread of meeting him. "He'll break every bone in my skin," said Tom; "or else I shall do *him* a mischief in my defence."

Ryder herself saw the wisdom of this: she bade him stay quiet, and she went to look after Griffith.

She found him in the drawing-room, with his head on the table, in deep dejection.

She assumed authority, and said he must go to bed.

He rose humbly, and followed her like a submissive dog.

She took him to his room. There was no fire.

"That is where you are to sleep," said she spitefully.

"It is better than I deserve," said he humbly.

The absurd rule about not hitting a man when he is down, has never obtained a place in the great female soul; so Ryder lashed him without mercy.

"Well, sir," said she, "methinks you have gained little by breaking faith with me. Y' had better have set up your inn with me, than gone and sinned against the law."

"Much better; would to heaven I had!"

"What d'ye mean to do now? You know the saying: Between two stools" —

"Child," said Griffith faintly, "methinks I shall trouble

neither long. I am not so ill a man as I seem; but who will believe that? I shall not live long. And I shall leave an ill name behind me. *She* told me so just now. And, oh, her eye was so cruel; I saw my death in it."

"Come come," said Ryder, relenting a little, "you mustn't believe every word an angry woman says. There, take my advice; go to bed; and in the morning don't speak to her; keep out of her way a day or two."

And with this piece of friendly advice she left him; and waited about till she thought he was in bed and asleep.

Then she brought Thomas Leicester up to her mistress.

But Griffith was not in bed; and he heard Leicester's heavy tread cross the landing. He waited and waited behind his door for more than half an hour, and then he heard the same heavy tread go away again.

By this time nearly all the inmates of the house were asleep.

About twenty-five minutes after Leicester left Mrs. Gaunt, Caroline Ryder stole quietly up-stairs from the kitchen; and sat down to think it all over.

She then proceeded to undress; but had only taken off her gown, when she started and listened; for a cry of distress reached her from outside the house.

She darted to the window and threw it open.

Then she heard a cry more distinct. "Help! help!"

It was a clear starlight night, but no moon.

The mere shone before her, and the cries were on the bank.

Now came something more alarming still. A flash: a pistol shot: and an agonized voice cried loudly, "Murder! Help! Murder!"

The voice she knew directly. It was Griffith Gaunt's.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Ryder ran screaming, and alarmed the other servants.

All the windows that looked on the mere were flung open.

But no more sounds were heard. A terrible silence brooded now over those clear waters.

The female servants huddled together, and quaked; for who could doubt that a bloody deed had been done?

It was some time before they mustered the presence of mind to go and tell Mrs. Gaunt. At last they opened her door. She was not in her room.

Ryder ran to Griffith's. It was locked.

She called to him. He made no reply.

They burst the door open. He was not there: and the window was open.

While their tongues were all going, in consternation, Mrs. Gaunt was suddenly among them, very pale.

They turned, and looked at her aghast.

"What means all this?" said she. "Did I not hear cries outside?"

"Ay," said Ryder: "Murder! and a pistol fired. Oh, my poor master!"

Mrs. Gaunt was white as death; but self-possessed. "Light torches this moment, and search the place," said she.

There was only one man in the house, and he declined to go out alone. So Ryder and Mrs. Gaunt went with him, all three bearing lighted links.

They searched the place where Ryder had heard the cries. They went up and down the whole bank of the

mere, and cast their torches' red light over the placid waters themselves. But there was nothing to be seen alive or dead; no trace either of calamity or crime.

They roused the neighbors, and came back to the house with their clothes all draggled and dirty.

Mrs. Gaunt took Ryder apart, and asked her if she could guess at what time of the night Griffith had made his escape.

"He is a villain," said she, "yet I would not have him come to harm, God knows. There are thieves abroad. But I hope he ran away as soon as your back was turned, and so fell not in with them."

"Humph!" said Ryder. Then, looking Mrs. Gaunt in the face, she said, quietly, "Where were you when you heard the cries?"

"I was on the other side of the house."

"What, out o' doors, at that time of night!"

"Ay; I was in the grove. Praying."

"Did you hear any voice you knew?"

"No: all was too indistinct. I heard a pistol, but no words. Did you?"

"I heard no more than you, madam," said Ryder, trembling.

No one went to bed any more that night in Hernshaw Castle.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

This mysterious circumstance made a great talk in the village, and in the kitchen of Hernshaw Castle; but not in the drawing-room: for Mrs. Gaunt instantly closed her door to visitors, and let it be known that it was her intention to retire to a convent; and in the meantime she desired not to be disturbed.

Ryder made one or two attempts to draw her out upon the subject, but was sternly checked.

Pale, gloomy, and silent, the mistress of Hernshaw Castle moved about the place like the ghost of her former self. She never mentioned Griffith; forbade his name to be uttered in her hearing; and, strange to say, gave Ryder strict orders not to tell any one what she had heard from Thomas Leicester.

"This last insult is known but to you and me. If it ever gets abroad, you leave my service that very hour."

This injunction set Ryder thinking. However, she obeyed it to the letter. Her place was getting better and better; and she was a woman accustomed to keep secrets.

A pressing letter came from Mr. Atkins.

Mrs. Gaunt replied that her husband had come to Hernshaw, but had left again; and the period of his ultimate return was now more uncertain than ever.

On this Mr. Atkins came down to Hernshaw Castle. But Mrs. Gaunt would not see him. He retired very angry; and renewed his advertisements, but in a more explicit form. He now published that Griffith Gaunt, of Hernshaw and Bolton, was executor and residuary legatee

to the late Griffith Gaunt, of Coggleswade; and requested him to apply directly to James Atkins, solicitor, of Gray's Inn, London.

In due course this advertisement was read by the servants at Hernshaw; and shown, by Ryder, to Mrs. Gaunt.

She made no comment whatever; and contrived to render her pale face impenetrable.

Ryder became as silent and thoughtful as herself, and often sat bending her black judicial brows.

By-and-by dark mysterious words began to be thrown out in Hernshaw village.

"He will never come back at all."

"He will never come into that fortune."

"'Tis no use advertising for a man that is past reading."

These, and the like equivocal sayings, were followed by a vague buzz, which was traceable to no individual author, but seemed to rise on all sides, like a dark mist, and envelop that unhappy house.

And that dark mist of rumor soon condensed itself into a palpable and terrible whisper, "Griffith Gaunt hath met with foul play."

No one of the servants told Mrs. Gaunt this horrid rumor.

But the women used to look at her, and after her, with strange eyes.

She noticed this, and felt, somehow, that her people were falling away from her. It added one drop to her bitter cup. She began to droop into a sort of calm despondent lethargy.

Then came fresh trouble to rouse her.

Two of the county magistrates called on her in their official capacity, and, with perfect politeness, but a very grave air, requested her to inform them of all the circumstances attending her husband's disappearance.

She replied, coldly and curtly, that she knew very little about it. Her husband had left in the middle of the night.

"He came to stay?"

"I believe so."

"Came on horseback?"

"Yes."

"Did he go away on horseback?"

"No: for the horse is now in my stable."

"Is it true there was a quarrel between you and him that evening?"

"Gentlemen," said Mrs. Gaunt, drawing herself back, haughtily, "did you come here to gratify your curiosity?"

"No, madam," said the elder of the two; "but to discharge a very serious and painful duty, in which I earnestly request you, and even advise you, to aid us. Was there a quarrel?"

"There was — a mortal quarrel."

The gentlemen exchanged glances, and the elder made a note.

"May we ask the subject of that quarrel?"

Mrs. Gaunt declined, positively, to enter into a matter so delicate.

A note was taken of this refusal.

"Are you aware, madam, that your husband's voice was heard calling for help, and that a pistol-shot was fired?"

Mrs. Gaunt trembled visibly.

"I heard the pistol-shot," said she, "but not the voice distinctly. Oh, I hope it was not his voice Ryder heard."

"Ryder, who is he?"

"Ryder is my lady's-maid: her bedroom is on that side the house."

"Can we see Mrs. Ryder?"

"Certainly," said Mrs. Gaunt, and rose and rang the bell.

Mrs. Ryder answered the bell, in person, very promptly; for she was listening at the door.

Being questioned, she told the magistrates what she had heard down by "the mere;" and said she was sure it was her master's voice that cried "Help!" and "Murder!" And with this she began to cry.

Mrs. Gaunt trembled and turned pale.

The magistrates confined their questions to Ryder.

They elicited, however, very little more from her. She saw the drift of their questions, and had an impulse to defend her mistress there present. Behind her back it would have been otherwise.

That resolution once taken, two children might as well have tried to extract evidence from her as two justices of the peace.

And then Mrs. Gaunt's pale face and noble features touched them. The case was mysterious, but no more; and they departed little the wiser, and with some apologies for the trouble they had given her.

The next week down came Mr. Atkins, out of all patience, and determined to find Griffith Gaunt, or else obtain some proof of his decease.

He obtained two interviews with Ryder, and bribed her to tell him all she knew. He prosecuted other inquiries with more method than had hitherto been used, and elicited an important fact, viz., that Griffith Gaunt had been seen walking in a certain direction at one o'clock in the morning, followed at a short distance by a tall man with a knapsack, or the like, on his back.

The person who gave this tardy information was the wife of a certain farmer's man who wired hares upon the sly. The man himself, being assured that, in a case so serious as this, no particular inquiries should be made

how he came to be out so late, confirmed what his wife had let out, and added that both men had taken the way that would lead them to the bridge, meaning the bridge over the mere. More than that he could not say, for he had *met* them, and was full half a mile from the mere, before those men could have reached it.

Following up this clew, Mr. Atkins learned so many ugly things, that he went to the bench on justicing day, and demanded a full and searching inquiry on the premises.

Sir George Neville, after in vain opposing this, rode off straight from the bench to Hernshaw, and in feeling terms conveyed the bad news to Mrs. Gaunt, and then, with the utmost delicacy, let her know that some suspicion rested upon herself, which she would do well to meet with the bold front of innocence.

"What suspicion, pray?" said Mrs. Gaunt haughtily.

Sir George shrugged his shoulders, and replied, "That you have done Gaunt the honor — to put him out of the way."

Mrs. Gaunt took this very differently from what Sir George expected.

"What!" she cried, "are they so sure he is dead? murdered!"

And with this she went into a passion of grief and remorse.

Even Sir George was puzzled, as well as affected, by her convulsive agitation.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Though it was known the proposed inquiry might result in the committal of Mrs. Gaunt on a charge of murder, yet the respect in which she had hitherto been held, and the influence of Sir George Neville, who, having been her lover, stoutly maintained her innocence, prevailed so far, that even this inquiry was private, and at her own house. Only she was present in the character of a suspected person, and the witnesses were examined before her.

First, the poacher gave his evidence.

Then Jane, the cook, proved that a peddler called Thomas Leicester had been in the kitchen, and secreted about the premises till a late hour; and this Thomas Leicester corresponded exactly to the description given by the poacher.

This threw suspicion on Thomas Leicester, but did not connect Mrs. Gaunt with the deed in any way.

But Ryder's evidence filled this gap. She revealed three serious facts: —

First, that, by her mistress's orders, she had introduced this very Leicester into her mistress's room about midnight, where he had remained nearly half an hour, and had then left the house.

Secondly, that Mrs. Gaunt herself had been out of doors after midnight.

And, thirdly, that she had listened at the door, and heard her threaten Griffith Gaunt's life.

This is a mere *précis* of the evidence, and altogether it looked so suspicious that the magistrates, after telling

Mrs. Gaunt she could ask the witnesses any question she chose, a suggestion she treated with marked contempt, put their heads together a moment, and whispered. Then the eldest of them, Mr. Underhill, who lived at a considerable distance, told her gravely he must commit her to take her trial at the next assizes.

"Do what you conceive to be your duty, gentlemen," said Mrs. Gaunt with marvellous dignity. "If I do not assert my innocence, it is because I disdain the accusation too much."

"I shall take no part in the committal of this innocent lady," said George Neville; and was about to leave the room.

But Mrs. Gaunt begged him to stay. "To be guilty, is one thing," said she; "to be accused, is another; I shall go to prison as easy as to my dinner, and to the gallows as to my bed."

The presiding magistrate was staggered a moment by these words; and it was not without considerable hesitation he took the warrant, and prepared to fill it up.

Then Mr. Houseman, who had watched the proceedings very keenly, put in his word. "I am here for the accused person, sir, and, with your good leave, object to her committal — on grounds of law."

"What may they be, Mr. Houseman?" said the magistrate civilly, and laid his pen down to hear them.

"Briefly, sir, these: where a murder is proven, you can commit a subject of this realm upon suspicion; but you cannot suspect the murder as well as the culprit, and so commit. The murder must be proved to the senses. Now in this case the death of Mr. Gaunt by violence is not proved. Indeed, his very death rests but upon suspicion. I admit that the law of England in this respect has once or twice been tampered with, and persons have even been executed where no *corpus delicti* was found;

but what was the consequence? In each case the murdered man turned out to be alive, and justice was the only murderer. After Harrison's case and *'s, no Cumberland jury will ever commit for murder, unless the *corpus delicti* has been found, and with signs of violence upon it. Come, come, Mr. Atkins, you are too good a lawyer, and too humane a man, to send my client to prison on the suspicion of a suspicion, which you know the very breath of the judge will blow away, even if the grand jury let it go into court. I offer bail, ten thousand pounds in two sureties; Sir George Neville here present, and myself."

The magistrate looked at Mr. Atkins.

"I am not employed by the Crown," said that gentleman, "but acting on mere civil grounds, and have no right nor wish to be severe. Bail by all means; but is the lady so sure of her innocence as to lend me her assistance to find the *corpus delicti?*"

The question was so shrewdly put, that any hesitation would have ruined Mrs. Gaunt.

Houseman, therefore, replied eagerly and promptly, "I answer for her, she will."

Mrs. Gaunt bowed her head in assent.

"Then," said Atkins, "I ask leave to drag, and, if need be, to drain, that piece of water there, called the mere."

"Drag it, or drain it, which you will," said Houseman.

Said Atkins, very impressively, "And, mark my words, at the bottom of that very sheet of water there, I shall find the remains of the late Griffith Gaunt."

At these solemn words, coming, as they did, not from a loose unprofessional speaker, but from a lawyer, a man who measured all his words, a very keen observer might have seen a sort of tremor run all through Mr. Houseman's frame. The more admirable was the perfect coolness and seeming indifference with which he replied:

"Find him, and I'll admit suicide; find him, with signs of violence, and I'll admit homicide, by some person or persons unknown."

All further remarks were interrupted by bustle and confusion.

Mrs. Gaunt had fainted dead away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Of course pity was the first feeling; but, by the time Mrs. Gaunt revived, her fainting, so soon after Mr. Atkins's proposal, had produced a sinister effect on the minds of all present; and every face showed it, except the wary Houseman's.

On her retiring, it broke out first in murmurs, then in plain words.

As for Mr. Atkins, he now showed the moderation of an able man who feels he has a strong cause.

He merely said, "I think there should be constables about, in case of an escape being attempted; but I agree with Mr. Houseman, that your worships will be quite justified in taking bail, provided the *corpus delicti* should not be found. Gentlemen, you were most of you neighbors and friends of the deceased, and are, I am sure, lovers of justice; I do entreat you to aid me in searching that piece of water, by the side of which the deceased gentleman was heard to cry for help; and, much I fear, he cried in vain."

The persons thus appealed to entered into the matter with all the ardor of just men, whose curiosity as well as justice is inflamed.

A set of old rusty drags was found on the premises; and men went punting up and down the mere, and dragged it.

Rude hooks were made by the village blacksmith, and fitted to cart-ropes; another boat was brought to Hernshaw in a wagon, and all that afternoon the bottom of the mere was raked, and some curious things fished up. But no dead man.

The next day a score of amateur dragsmen were out; some throwing their drags from the bridge; some circulating in boats, and even in large tubs.

And, meantime, Mr. Atkins and his crew went steadily up and down, dragging every foot of those placid waters.

They worked till dinner-time, and brought up a good copper pot with two handles, a horse's head, and several decayed trunks of trees, which had become saturated, and sunk to the bottom.

At about three in the afternoon, two boys who, for want of a boat, were dragging from the bridge, found something heavy but elastic at the end of their drag; they pulled up eagerly, and a thing like a huge turnip, half gnawed, came up, with a great bob, and blasted their sight.

They let go, drags and all, and stood shrieking and shrieking.

Those who were nearest them called out, and asked what was the matter; but the boys did not reply, and their faces showed so white, that a woman, who saw them, screamed to Mr. Atkins, and said she was sure those boys had seen something out of the common.

Mr. Atkins came up, and found the boys blubbering. He encouraged them, and they told him a fearful thing had come up; it was like a man's head and shoulders all scooped out and gnawed by the fishes, and had torn the drags out of their hands.

Mr. Atkins made them tell him the exact place; and was soon upon it with his boat.

The water here was very deep, and though the boys kept pointing to the very spot, the drags found nothing for some time.

But at last they showed, by their resistance, that they had clawed hold of something.

"Draw slowly," said Mr. Atkins, "and, *if it is,* be men, and hold fast."

The men drew slowly, slowly, and presently there rose to the surface a thing to strike terror and loathing into the stoutest heart.

The mutilated remains of a human face and body.

The greedy pike had cleared, not the features only, but the entire flesh off the face; but had left the hair and the tight skin of the forehead, though their teeth had raked this last. The remnants they had left made what they had mutilated doubly horrible; since now it was not a skull, not a skeleton, but a face and a man gnawed down to the bones and hair and feet. These last were in stout shoes that resisted even those voracious teeth; and a leathern stock had offered some little protection to the throat.

The men groaned, and hid their faces with one hand, and pulled softly to the shore with the other; and then, with half-averted faces, they drew the ghastly remains and fluttering rags gently and reverently to land.

Mr. Atkins yielded to nature, and was violently sick at the sight he had searched for so eagerly.

As soon as he recovered his powers, he bade the constables guard the body (it was a body, in law), and see that no one laid so much as a finger on it until some magistrate had taken a deposition. He also sent a messenger to Mr. Houseman, telling him the *corpus delicti* was found. He did this, partly to show that gentleman he was right in his judgment, and partly out of common humanity; since, after this discovery, Mr. Houseman's client was sure to be tried for her life.

A magistrate soon came, and viewed the remains, and took careful notes of the state in which they were found.

Houseman came, and was much affected, both by the sight of his dead friend so mutilated, and by the probable consequences to Mrs. Gaunt. However, as lawyers fight very hard, he recovered himself enough to remark

that there were no marks of violence before death, and insisted on this being inserted in the magistrate's notes.

An inquest was ordered next day, and meantime Mrs. Gaunt was told she could not quit the upper apartments of her own house. Two constables were placed on the ground floor night and day.

Next day the remains were removed to the little inn, where Griffith had spent so many jovial hours; laid on a table, and covered with a white sheet.

The coroner's jury sat in the same room, as was then the custom, and the evidence I have already noticed was gone into, and the finding of the body deposed to. The jury, without hesitation, returned a verdict of wilful murder.

Mrs. Gaunt was then brought in. She came, white as a ghost, leaning upon Houseman's shoulder.

Upon her entering, a juryman, by a humane impulse, drew the sheet over the remains again.

The coroner, according to the custom of the day, put a question to Mrs. Gaunt, with the view of eliciting her guilt. If I remember right, he asked her how she came to be out of doors so late on the night of the murder. Mrs. Gaunt, however, was in no condition to answer queries. I doubt if she even heard this one. Her lovely eyes, dilated with horror, were fixed on that terrible sheet, with a stony glance. "Show me," she gasped, "and let me die too."

The jurymen looked, with doubtful faces, at the coroner. He bowed a grave assent.

The nearest juryman withdrew the sheet.

Now, the belief was not yet extinct that the dead body shows some signs of its murderer's approach.

So every eye glared on her and it by turns, as she, with dilated, horror-stricken orbs, looked on that awful thing.

CHAPTER XL.

She recoiled with a violent shudder at first, and hid her face with one hand. Then she gradually stole a horror-stricken side glance.

She had not looked at it so a moment, when she uttered a loud cry, and pointed at its feet with quivering hand.

"The shoes! the shoes! It is not my Griffith."

With this she fell into violent hysterics, and was carried out of the room at Houseman's earnest entreaty.

As soon as she was gone, Mr. Houseman, being freed from his fear that his client would commit herself irretrievably, recovered a show of composure, and his wits went keenly to work.

"On behalf of the accused," said he, "I admit the suicide of some person unknown, wearing heavy hobnailed shoes; probably one of the lower order of people."

This adroit remark produced some little effect, notwithstanding the strong feeling against the accused.

The coroner inquired if there were any bodily marks by which the remains could be identified.

"My master had a long black mole on his forehead," suggested Caroline Ryder.

"'Tis here!" cried a juryman, bending over the remains.

And now they all gathered in great excitement round the *corpus delicti;* and there, sure enough, was a long black mole.

Then was there a buzz of pity for Griffith Gaunt, followed by a stern murmur of execration.

"Gentlemen," said the coroner, solemnly, "behold in this the finger of Heaven. The poor gentleman may well have put off his boots, since, it seems, he left his horse; but he could not take from his forehead his natal sign; and that, by God's will, hath strangely escaped mutilation, and revealed a most foul deed. We must now do our duty, gentlemen, without respect of persons."

A warrant was then issued for the apprehension of Thomas Leicester. And, that same night, Mrs. Gaunt left Hernshaw in her own chariot between two constables, and escorted by armed yeomen.

Her proud head was bowed almost to her knees, and her streaming eyes hidden in her lovely hands. For why? A mob accompanied her for miles, shouting, "Murderess! — Bloody Papist! — Hast done to death the kindliest gentleman in Cumberland. We'll all come to see thee hanged. — Fair face but foul heart!" — and groaning, hissing, and cursing, and indeed only kept from violence by the escort.

And so they took that poor proud lady and lodged her in Carlisle jail.

She was *enceinte* into the bargain. By the man she was to be hanged for murdering.

CHAPTER XLI.

The county was against her, with some few exceptions. Sir George Neville and Mr. Houseman stood stoutly by her.

Sir George's influence and money obtained her certain comforts in jail: and, in that day, the law of England was so far respected in a jail, that untried prisoners were not thrown into cells, nor impeded, as they now are, in preparing their defence.

Her two stanch friends visited her every day, and tried to keep her heart up.

But they could not do it. She was in a state of dejection bordering upon lethargy.

"If he is dead," said she, "what matters it? If, by God's mercy, he is alive still, he will not let me die for want of a word from him. Impatience hath been my bane. Now, I say, God's will be done. I am weary of the world."

Houseman tried every argument to rouse her out of this desperate frame of mind; but in vain.

It ran its course, and then, behold, it passed away like a cloud, and there came a keen desire to live and defeat her accusers.

She made Houseman write out all the evidence against her; and she studied it by day, and thought of it by night; and often surprised both her friends by the acuteness of her remarks.

Mr. Atkins discontinued his advertisements; it was Houseman who now filled every paper with notices informing Griffith Gaunt of his accession to fortune, and

entreated him for that, and other weighty reasons, to communicate in confidence with his old friend John Houseman, attorney-at-law.

Houseman was too wary to invite him to appear and save his wife; for, in that case, he feared the Crown would use his advertisements as evidence at the trial, should Griffith not appear.

The fact is, Houseman relied more upon certain *lacunæ* in the evidence, and the absence of all marks of violence, than upon any hope that Griffith might be alive.

The assizes drew near, and no fresh light broke in upon this mysterious case.

Mrs. Gaunt lay in her bed at night, and thought and thought.

Now the female understanding has sometimes remarkable power under such circumstances. By degrees truth flashes across it, like lightning in the dark.

After many such nightly meditations, Mrs. Gaunt sent one day for Sir George Neville and Mr. Houseman, and addressed them as follows: "I believe he is alive, and that I can guess where he is at this moment."

Both the gentlemen started and looked amazed.

"Yes, sirs; so sure as we sit here, he is now at a little inn at Lancashire, called the 'Packhorse,' with a woman he calls his wife." And, with this, her face was scarlet, and her eyes flashed their old fire.

She exacted a solemn promise of secrecy from them, and then she told them all she had learned from Thomas Leicester.

"And so now," said she, "I believe you can save my life, if you think it is worth saving." And with this she began to cry bitterly.

But Houseman, the practical, had no patience with the pangs of love betrayed, and jealousy, and such small deer, in a client whose life was at stake.

"Great Heaven! madam," said he, roughly, "why did you not tell me this before?"

"Because I am not a man — to go and tell everything all at once," sobbed Mrs. Gaunt. "Besides, I wanted to shield his good name, whose dear life they pretend I have taken."

As soon as she recovered her composure, she begged Sir George Neville to ride to the "Packhorse" for her. Sir George assented eagerly; but asked how he was to find it. "I have thought of that too," said she. "His black horse has been to and fro. Ride that horse into Lancashire, and give him his head; ten to one but he takes you to the place, or where you may hear of it. If not, go to Lancaster, and ask about the 'Packhorse.' He wrote to me from Lancaster: see." And she showed him the letter.

Sir George embraced with ardor this opportunity of serving her. "I'll be at Hernshaw in one hour," said he, "and ride the black horse south at once."

"Excuse me," said Houseman: "but would it not be better for me to go? As a lawyer, I may be more able to cope with her."

"Nay," said Mrs. Gaunt, "Sir George is young and handsome; if he manages well, she will tell him more than she will you. All I beg of him is, to drop the chevalier for this once, and see women with a woman's eyes and not a man's; see them *as they are.* Do not go telling a creature of this kind that she has had my money, as well as my husband, and ought to pity me lying here in prison. Keep me out of her sight as much as you can. Whether Griffith hath deceived her or not, you will never raise in her any feeling but love for him, and hatred for his lawful wife. Dress like a yeoman; go quietly, and lodge in the house a day or two; begin by flattering her; and then get from her when she saw

him last, or heard from him. But indeed I fear you will surprise him with her."

"Fear?" exclaimed Sir George.

"Well, hope, then," said the lady; and a tear trickled down her face in a moment. "But, if you do, promise me, on your honor as a gentleman, not to affront him, for I know you think him a villain."

"A d——d villain! saving your presence."

"Well, sir, you have said it to me. Now promise me to say nought to *him*, but just this: 'Rose Gaunt's mother she lies in Carlisle jail, to be tried for her life for murdering you. She begs of you not to let her die publicly upon the scaffold; but quietly at home, of her broken heart.'"

"Write it," said Sir George, with the tears in his eyes, "that I may just put it in his hand: for I can never utter your sweet words to such a monster as he is."

Armed with this appeal, and several minute instructions, which it is needless to particularize here, that stanch friend rode into Lancashire.

And next day the black horse justified his mistress's sagacity, and his own.

He seemed all along to know where he was going, and late in the afternoon he turned off the road on to a piece of green: and Sir George, with beating heart, saw right before him the sign of the "Packhorse," and, on coming nearer, the words Thomas Leicester.

He dismounted at the door, and asked if he could have a bed.

Mrs. Vint said Yes; and supper into the bargain, if he liked.

He ordered a substantial supper directly.

Mrs. Vint saw at once it was a good customer, and showed him into the parlor.

He sat down by the fire. But, the moment she retired,

he got up and made a circuit of the house, looking quietly into every window, to see if he could catch a glance of Griffith Gaunt.

There were no signs of him; and Sir George returned to his parlor heavy-hearted. One hope, the greatest of all, had been defeated directly. Still, it was just possible that Griffith might be away on temporary business.

In this faint hope, Sir George strolled about till his supper was ready for him.

When he had eaten his supper, he rang the bell, and, taking advantage of a common custom, insisted on the landlord, Thomas Leicester, taking a glass with him.

"Thomas Leicester!" said the girl. "He is not at home. But I'll send Master Vint."

Old Vint came in, and readily accepted an invitation to drink his guest's health.

Sir George found him loquacious, and soon extracted from him that his daughter Mercy was Leicester's wife, that Leicester was gone on a journey, and that Mercy was in care for him. "Leastways," said he, "she is very dull, and cries at times when her mother speaks of him; but she is too close to say much."

All this puzzled Sir George Neville sorely.

But greater surprises were in store.

The next morning, after breakfast, the servant came and told him Dame Leicester desired to see him.

He started at that; but put on nonchalance, and said he was at her service.

He was ushered into another parlor, and there he found a grave, comely young woman, seated working, with a child on the floor beside her. She rose quietly; he bowed low and respectfully; she blushed faintly; but with every appearance of self-possession, courtesied to him; then eyed him point-blank a single moment; and requested him to be seated.

"I hear, sir," said she, "you did ask my father many questions last night; may I ask you one?"

Sir George colored, but bowed assent.

"From whom had you the black horse you ride?"

Now, if Sir George had not been a veracious man, he would have been caught directly. But, although he saw at once the oversight he had committed, he replied, "I had him of a lady in Cumberland, one Mistress Gaunt."

Mercy Vint trembled.

"No doubt," said she, softly. "Excuse my question; you shall understand that the horse is well known here."

"Madam," said Sir George, "if you admire the horse, he is at your service for twenty pounds, though indeed he is worth more."

"I thank you, sir," said Mercy, "I have no desire for the horse whatever; and be pleased to excuse my curiosity; you must think me impertinent."

"Nay, madam," said Sir George, "I consider nothing impertinent that hath procured me the pleasure of an interview with you."

He then, as directed by Mrs. Gaunt, proceeded to flatter the mother and the child, and exerted those powers of pleasing which had made him irresistible in society.

Here, however, he found they went a very little way. Mercy did not even smile. She cast out of her dove-like eyes a gentle, humble, reproachful glance, as much as to say, "What? do I seem so vain a creature as to believe all this?"

Sir George himself had tact and sensibility; and, by-and-by, became discontented with the part he was playing, under those meek, honest eyes.

There was a pause: and, as her sex have a wonderful art of reading the face, Mercy looked at him steadily,

and said, "*Yes,* sir, 'tis best to be straightforward, especially with women-folk."

Before he could recover this little facer, she said, quietly, "What is your name?"

"George Neville."

"Well, George Neville," said Mercy, very slowly and softly, "when you have a mind to tell me what you came here for, and who sent you, you will find me in this little room. I seldom leave it now. I beg you to speak your errand to none but me." And she sighed deeply.

Sir George bowed low, and retired to collect his wits.

He had come here strongly prepossessed against Mercy. But, instead of a vulgar, shallow woman, whom he was to surprise into confession, he encountered a soft-eyed Puritan, all unpretending dignity, grace, propriety, and sagacity.

"Flatter her!" said he, to himself, "I might as well flatter an iceberg. Outwit her! I feel like a child beside her."

He strolled about in a brown study, not knowing what to do.

She had given him a fair opening. She had invited him to tell the truth. But he was afraid to take her at her word: and yet what was the use to persist in what his own eyes told him was the wrong course?

Whilst he hesitated, and debated within himself, a trifling incident turned the scale.

A poor woman came begging, with her child, and was received rather roughly by Harry Vint. "Pass on, good woman," said he, "we want no tramps here."

Then a window was opened on the ground floor, and Mercy beckoned the woman. Sir George flattened himself against the wall, and listened to the two talking.

Mercy examined the woman gently, but shrewdly, and

elicited a tale of genuine distress. Sir George then saw her hand out to the woman some warm flannel for herself, a piece of stuff for the child, a large piece of bread, and a sixpence.

He also caught sight of Mercy's dove-like eyes, as she bestowed her alms, and they were lit with an inward lustre.

"She cannot be an ill woman," thought Sir George. "I'll e'en go by my own eyes and judgment. After all, Mrs. Gaunt has never seen her; and I have."

He went and knocked at Mercy's door.

"Come in," said a mild voice.

Neville entered, and said abruptly, and with great emotion, "Madam, I see you can feel for the unhappy; so I take my own way now, and appeal to your pity. I *have* come to speak to you on the saddest business."

"You come from *him*," said Mercy, closing her lips tight; but her bosom heaved. Her heart and her judgment grappled like wrestlers at that moment.

"Nay, madam," said Sir George, "I come from *her*."

Mercy knew in a moment who "her" must be.

She looked scared, and drew back with manifest signs of repulsion.

The movement did not escape Sir George: it alarmed him: he remembered what Mrs. Gaunt had said; that this woman would be sure to hate Gaunt's lawful wife. But it was too late to go back. He did the next best thing, he rushed on.

He threw himself on his knees before Mercy Vint.

"Oh, madam!" he cried, piteously, "do not set your heart against the most unhappy lady in England. If you did but know her, her nobleness, her misery! Before you steel yourself against me, her friend, let me ask you one question. Do you know where Mrs. Gaunt is at this moment?"

Mercy answered coldly, "How should I know where the lady is?"

"Well, then, she lies in Carlisle jail."

"She — lies — in Carlisle jail?" repeated Mercy, looking all confused.

"They accuse her of murdering her husband."

Mercy uttered a scream, and catching her child up on the floor, began to rock herself and moan over it.

"No, no, no," cried Sir George, "she is innocent, she is innocent."

"What is that to *me?*" cried Mercy wildly. "He is murdered, he is dead, and my child an orphan." And so she went on moaning and rocking herself.

"But I tell you he is not dead at all," cried Sir George. "'Tis all a mistake. When did you see him last?"

"More than six weeks ago."

"I mean, when did you hear from him last?"

"Never, since that day."

Sir George groaned aloud at this intelligence.

And Mercy, who heard him groan, was heart-broken. She accused herself of Griffith's death. "'Twas I who drove him from me," said she. "'Twas I who bade him go back to his lawful wife; and the wretch hated him. I sent him to his death." Her grief was wild and deep; she could not hear Sir George's arguments.

But presently she said sternly, "What does that woman say for herself?"

"Madam," said Sir George dejectedly, "Heaven knows you are in no condition to fathom a mystery that hath puzzled wiser heads than yours or mine; and I am but little able to lay the tale before you fairly: for your grief it moves me deeply, and I could curse myself for putting the matter to you so bluntly and uncouthly. Permit me to retire a while, and compose my own spirits for the task I have undertaken too rashly."

"Nay, George Neville," said Mercy, "stay you there; only give me a moment to draw my breath."

She struggled hard for a little composure, and, after a shower of tears, she hung her head over the chair like a crushed thing, but made him a sign of attention.

Sir George told the story as fairly as he could; only of course his bias was in favor of Mrs. Gaunt. But as Mercy's bias was against her, this brought the thing nearly square.

When he came to the finding of the body, Mercy was seized with a deadly faintness; and, though she did not become insensible, yet she was in no condition to judge or even to comprehend.

Sir George was moved with pity, and would have called for help: but she shook her head. So then he sprinkled water on her face, and slapped her hand: and a beautifully moulded hand it was.

When she got a little better she sobbed faintly, and sobbing thanked him, and begged him to go on.

"My mind is stronger than my heart," she said. "I'll hear it all, though it kill me where I sit."

Sir George went on, and, to avoid repetition, I must ask the reader to understand that he left out nothing whatever which has been hitherto related in these pages; and, in fact, told her one or two little things that I have omitted.

When he had done, she sat quite still a minute or two, pale as a statue.

Then she turned to Neville, and said solemnly, "You wish to know the truth in this dark matter: for dark it is, in very sooth."

Neville was much impressed by her manner, and answered respectfully, Yes, he desired to know — by all means.

"Then take my hand," said Mercy, "and kneel down with me."

Sir George looked surprised, but obeyed, and kneeled down beside her, with his hand in hers.

There was a long pause, and then took place a transformation.

The dove-like eyes were lifted to heaven, and gleamed like opals with an inward and celestial light; the comely face shone with a higher beauty, and the rich voice rose in ardent supplication:

"Thou God, to whom all hearts be known, and no secrets hid from thine eye, look down now on thy servant in sore trouble, that putteth her trust in thee. Give wisdom to the simple this day, and understanding to the lowly. Thou that didst reveal to babes and sucklings the great things that were hidden from the wise, oh show us the truth in this dark matter: enlighten us by thy Spirit, for His dear sake, who suffered more sorrows than I suffer now. Amen, amen."

Then she looked at Neville: and he said "Amen," with all his heart, and the tears in his eyes.

He had never heard real live prayer before. Here the little hand gripped his hard, as she wrestled, and the heart seemed to rise out of the bosom and fly to heaven on the sublime and thrilling voice.

They rose, and she sat down; but it seemed as if her eyes once raised to heaven in prayer could not come down again: they remained fixed and angelic, and her lips still moved in supplication.

Sir George Neville, though a loose liver, was no scoffer; he was smitten with reverence for this inspired countenance, and retired, bowing low and obsequiously.

He took a long walk and thought it all over. One thing was clear and consoling. He felt sure he had done wisely to disobey Mrs. Gaunt's instructions, and make a friend of Mercy, instead of trying to set his wits against hers. Ere he returned to the "Packhorse," he

had determined to take another step in the right direction. He did not like to agitate her with another interview, so soon. But he wrote her a little letter.

MADAM, — When I came here, I did not know you; and therefore I feared to trust you too far. But, now I do know you for the best woman in England, I take the open way with you.

Know that Mrs. Gaunt said the man would be here with you; and she charged me with a few written lines to him. She would be angry if she knew that I had shown them to any other. Yet I take on me to show them to you: for I believe you are wiser than any of us, if the truth were known. I do therefore entreat you to read these lines, and tell me whether you think the hand that wrote them can have shed the blood of him to whom they are writ. I am, madam, with profound respect,

Your grateful and very humble servant,

GEORGE NEVILLE.

He very soon received a line in reply, written in a clear and beautiful handwriting.

"Mercy Vint sends you her duty; and she will speak to you at nine of the clock to-morrow morning. Pray for light."

At the appointed time Sir George found her working with her needle. His letter lay on the table before her.

She rose and courtesied to him, and called the servant to take away the child for awhile. She went with her to the door and kissed the bairn several times at parting, as if he was going away for good. "I'm loath to let him go," said she to Neville; "but it weakens a mother's mind to have her babe in the room; takes her attention off each moment. Pray you be seated. Well, sir, I have read these lines of Mistress Gaunt, and wept over them. Methinks I had not done so, were they cunningly devised. Also I lay all night and thought."

"That is just what she does."

"No doubt, sir; and the upshot is, I don't *feel* as if he was dead. Thank God."

"That is something," said Neville. But he could not help thinking it was very little; especially to produce in a court of justice.

"And now," said she thoughtfully, "you say that the real Thomas Leicester was seen thereabouts as well as my Thomas Leicester. Then answer me one little question. What had the real Thomas Leicester on his feet that night?"

"Nay, I know not," was the half-careless reply.

"Bethink you. 'Tis a question that must have been often put in your hearing."

"Begging your pardon, it was never put at all; nor do I see" —

"What, not at the inquest?"

"No."

"That is very strange. What, so many wise heads have bent over this riddle, and not one to ask how was yon peddler shod!"

"Madam," said Sir George, "our minds were fixed upon the fate of Gaunt. Many did ask how was the peddler armed; but none how was he shod."

"Hath he been seen since?"

"Not he; and that hath an ugly look; for the constables are out after him with hue and cry; but he is not to be found."

"Then," said Mercy, "I must e'en answer my own question. I do know how that peddler was shod. WITH HOBNAILED SHOES."

Sir George bounded from his chair. One great ray of daylight broke in upon him.

"Ay," said Mercy, "she was right. Women do see clearer in some things than men. The pair went from

my house to hers: he you call Griffith Gaunt had on a new pair of boots; and by the same token 'twas I did pay for them, and there is the receipt in that cupboard: he you call Thomas Leicester went hence in hobnailed shoes. I think the body they found was the body of Thomas Leicester, the peddler. May God have mercy on his poor unprepared soul!"

Sir George uttered a joyful exclamation. But the next moment he had a doubt. "Ay, but," said he, "you forgot the mole. 'Twas on that they built."

"I forget nought," said Mercy, calmly. "The peddler had a black mole over his left temple. He showed it me in this very room. You have found the body of Thomas Leicester, and Griffith Gaunt is hiding from the law that he hath broken. He is afeared of her and her friends if he shows his face in Cumberland; he is afeared of my folk if he be seen in Lancashire. Ah, Thomas, as if I would let them harm thee!"

Sir George Neville walked to and fro in grand excitement.

"Oh, blessed day that I came hither. Madam, you are an angel. You will save an innocent broken-hearted lady from death and dishonor. Your good heart and rare wit have read in a moment the dark riddle that hath puzzled a county."

"George," said Mercy, gravely, "you have gotten the wrong end of the stick. The wise in their own conceit are blinded; in Cumberland, where all this befell, they went not to God for light, as you and I did, George."

In saying this she gave him her hand to celebrate their success.

He kissed it devoutly, and owned afterwards that it was the proudest moment of his life, when that sweet Puritan gave him her neat hand so cordially, with a pressure so gentle yet frank.

And now came the question how they were to make a Cumberland jury see this matter as they saw it.

He asked her would she come to the trial as a witness ?

At that she drew back with manifest repugnance.

"My shame would be public. I must tell who I am; and what. A ruined woman."

"Say, rather an injured saint. You have nothing to be ashamed of. All good men would feel for you."

Mercy shook her head. "Ay, but the women; shame is shame with us; right or wrong goes for little. Nay, I hope to do better for you than that. I must find *him:* and send him to deliver her. 'Tis his only chance of happiness."

She then asked him if he would draw up an advertisement of quite a different kind from those he had described to her.

He assented, and between them they concocted the following: —

"If Thomas Leicester, who went from the 'Packhorse' two months ago, will come thither at once, Mercy will be much beholden to him, and tell him strange things that have befallen."

Sir George then, at her request, rode over to Lancaster, and inserted the above in the county paper, and also in a small sheet that was issued in the city three times a week. He had also handbills to the same effect printed, and sent into Cumberland and Westmoreland. Finally he sent a copy to his man of business in London, with orders to insert it in all the journals.

Then he returned to the "Packhorse," and told Mercy what he had done.

The next day he bade her farewell, and away for Carlisle. It was a two days' journey. He reached Carlisle in the evening, and went all glowing to Mrs.

Gaunt. "Madam," said he, "be of good cheer. I bless the day I went to see her; she is an angel of wit and goodness." He then related to her, in glowing terms, most that had passed between Mercy and him. But to his surprise, Mrs. Gaunt wore a cold, forbidding air.

"This is all very well," said she. "But 'twill avail me little unless *he* comes before the judge and clears me; and she will never let him do that."

"Ay, that she will — if she can find him."

"If she can find him? How simple you are!"

"Nay, madam, not so simple but I can tell a good woman from a bad one, and a true from a false."

"What! when you are in love with her? Not if you were the wisest of your sex."

"In love with her?" cried Sir George; and colored high.

"Ay," said the lady. "Think you I cannot tell? Don't deceive yourself. You have gone and fallen in love with her. At your years! Not that 'tis any business of mine."

"Well, madam," said Sir George, stiffly, "say what you please on that score; but, at least welcome my good news."

Mrs. Gaunt begged him to excuse her petulance, and thanked him kindly for all he had just done. But the next moment she rose from her chair in great agitation, and burst out, "I'd as lief die as owe anything to that woman."

Sir George remonstrated. "Why hate her? She does not hate you."

"Oh, yes, she does. 'Tis not in nature she should do any other."

"Her acts prove the contrary."

"Her acts! she has *done* nothing but make fair promises; and that has blinded you. Women of this sort

are very cunning, and never show their real characters to a man. No more; prithee mention not her name to me. It makes me ill. I know he is with her at this moment. Ah, let me die, and be forgotten: since I am no more beloved!"

The voice was sad and weary now, and the tears ran fast.

Poor Sir George was moved and melted, and set himself to flatter and console this impracticable lady, who hated her best friend in this sore strait, for being what she was herself, a woman; and was much less annoyed at being hanged than at not being loved.

When she was a little calmer he left her, and rode off to Houseman. That worthy was delighted. "Get her to swear to those hobnailed shoes," said he, "and we shall shake them." He then let Sir George know that he had obtained private information, which he would use in cross-examining a principal witness for the Crown. "However," he added, "do not deceive yourself: nothing can make the prisoner really safe but the appearance of Griffith Gaunt; he has such strong motives for coming to light; he is heir to a fortune, and his wife is accused of murdering him. The jury will never believe he is alive till they see him. That man's prolonged disappear ance is hideous. It turns my blood cold when I think of it."

"Do not despair on that score," said Neville. "I believe our good angel will produce him."

Three days only before the assizes, came the long-expected letter from Mercy Vint. Sir George tore it open, but bitter was his disappointment. The letter merely said that Griffith had not appeared in answer to her advertisements, and she was sore grieved and perplexed.

There were two postscripts, each on a little piece of paper.

First postscript in a tremulous hand, "Pray."

Second postscript, in a firm hand, "Drain that water."

Houseman shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Drain the mere? Let the Crown do that. We should but fish up more trouble. And prayers quo' she! 'Tis not prayers we want, but evidence."

He sent his clerk off to travel post night and day, and subpœna Mercy, and bring her back with him to the trial. She was to have every comfort on the road, and be treated like a duchess.

The evening before the assizes, Mrs. Gaunt's apartments were Mr. Houseman's headquarters, and messages were coming and going all day, on matters connected with the defence.

Just at sunset, up rattled a post-chaise, and the clerk got out and came haggard and bloodshot before his employer.

"The witness has disappeared, sir. Left home last Tuesday, with her child, and has never been seen nor heard of since."

Here was a terrible blow. They all paled under it; it seriously diminished the chances of an acquittal.

But Mrs. Gaunt bore it nobly. She seemed to rise under it.

She turned to Sir George Neville with a sweet smile. "The noble heart sees base things noble. No wonder then an artful woman deluded *you*. He has left England with her; and condemned me to the gallows. In cold blood. So be it. I shall defend myself."

She then sat down with Mr. Houseman, and went through the written case he had prepared for her: and showed him notes she had taken of full a hundred criminal trials, great and small.

While they were putting their heads together, Sir George sat in a brown study, and uttered not a word

Presently he got up a little brusquely, and said, "I'm going to Hernshaw."

"What, at this time of night? What to do?"

"To obey my orders. To drain the mere."

"And who could have ordered you to drain my mere?"

"Mercy Vint."

Sir George uttered this in a very curious way, half ashamed, half resolute, and retired before Mrs. Gaunt could vent in speech the surprise and indignation that fired her eye.

Houseman implored her not to heed Sir George and his vagaries, but to bend her whole mind on those approved modes of defence with which he had supplied her.

Being now alone with her, he no longer concealed his great anxiety.

"We have lost an invaluable witness in that woman," said he. "I was mad to think she would come."

Mrs. Gaunt shivered with repugnance. "I would not have her come for all the world," said she. "For heaven's sake never mention her name to me. I want help from none but friends. Send Mrs. Houseman to me in the morning; and do not distress yourself so. I shall defend myself far better than you think. I have not studied a hundred trials for nought."

Thus the prisoner cheered up her attorney, and soon after insisted on his going home to bed, for she saw he was worn out by his exertions.

And now she was alone.

All was silent.

A few short hours, and she was to be tried for her life; tried, not by the All-wise Judge, but by fallible men, and under a system most unfavorable to the accused.

Worse than all this, she was a Papist: and, as ill-luck would have it, since her imprisonment an alarm had

been raised that the Pretender meditated another invasion. This report had set juries very much against all the Romanists in the country, and had already perverted justice in one or two cases, especially in the North.

Mrs. Gaunt knew all this, and trembled at the peril to come.

She spent the early part of the night in studying her defence. Then she laid it quite aside and prayed long and fervently.

Towards morning she fell asleep from exhaustion.

When she awoke, Mrs. Houseman was sitting by her bedside, looking at her, and crying.

They were soon clasped in each other's arms, condoling.

But presently Houseman came, and took his wife away rather angrily.

Mrs. Gaunt was prevailed on to eat a little toast and drink a glass of wine, and then she sat waiting her dreadful summons.

She waited, and waited, until she became impatient to face her danger.

But there were two petty larcenies on before her. She had to wait.

At last, about noon, came a message to say that the grand jury had found a true bill against her.

"Then may God forgive them!" said she.

Soon afterwards she was informed her time drew very near.

She made her toilet carefully, and passed with her attendant into a small room under the court.

Here she had to endure another chilling wait, and in a sombre room.

Presently she heard a voice above her cry out, "The King *versus* Catherine Gaunt."

Then she was beckoned to.

She mounted some steps, badly lighted, and found

herself in the glare of day, and greedy eyes, in the felons' dock.

In a matter entirely strange, we seldom know beforehand what we can do, and how we shall carry ourselves. Mrs. Gaunt no sooner set her foot in that dock, and saw the awful front of justice face to face, than her tremors abated, and all her powers awoke, and she thrilled with love of life, and bristled with all those fine arts of defence that nature lends to superior women.

She entered on that defence before she spoke a word; for she attacked the prejudices of the court by deportment.

She courtesied reverently to the judge, and contrived to make her reverence seem a willing homage, unmixed with fear.

She cast her eyes round, and saw the court thronged with ladies and gentlemen she knew. In a moment she read in their faces that only two or three were on her side. She bowed to those only; and they returned her courtesy. This gave an impression (a false one) that the gentry sympathized with her.

After a little murmur of functionaries, the Clerk of Arraigns turned to the prisoner, and said, in a loud voice, "Catherine Gaunt, hold up thy hand."

She held up her hand, and he recited the indictment, which charged that, not having the fear of God before her eyes, but being moved by the instigation of the Devil, she had on the fifteenth of October, in the tenth year of the reign of his present Majesty, aided and abetted one Thomas Leicester in an assault upon one Griffith Gaunt, Esq., and him the said Griffith Gaunt did with force and arms assassinate and do to death, against the peace of our said Lord the King, his crown and dignity.

After reading the indictment, the Clerk of Arraigns

turned to the prisoner: "How sayest thou, Catherine Gaunt, art thou guilty of the felony and murder whereof thou standest indicted — or not guilty?"

"I am not guilty."

"Culprit, how wilt thou be tried?"

"Culprit I am none, but only accused: I will be tried by God and my country."

"God send thee a good deliverance."

Mr. Whitworth, the junior counsel for the Crown, then rose to open the case; but the prisoner, with a pale face, but most courteous demeanor, begged his leave to make a previous motion to the court. Mr. Whitworth bowed, and sat down. "My lord," said she, "I have first a favor to ask: and that favor, methinks, you will grant, since it is but justice, impartial justice. My accuser, I hear, has two counsel; both learned and able. I am but a woman, and no match for their skill; therefore, I beg your lordship to allow me counsel on my defence, to matter of fact as well as of law. I know this is not usual; but it is just; and I am informed it has sometimes been granted in trials of life and death, and that your Lordship hath the *power*, if you have the *will*, to do me so much justice."

The judge looked towards Mr. Sergeant Wiltshire, who was the leader on the other side: he rose instantly and replied to this purpose: "The prisoner is misinformed. The truth is, that from time immemorial, and down to the other day, a person indicted for a capital offence was never allowed counsel at all, except to matters of law, and these must be started by himself. By recent practice, the rule hath been so far relaxed, that counsel have sometimes been permitted to examine, and cross-examine, witnesses for a prisoner, but never to make observations on the evidence, nor to draw inferences from it to the point in issue."

Mrs. Gaunt. So, then, if I be sued for a small sum of money, I may have skilled orators to defend me against their like. But, if I be sued for my life and honor, I may not oppose skill to skill, but must stand here a child against you that are masters. 'Tis a monstrous iniquity, and you yourself, sir, will not deny it.

Sergeant Wiltshire. Madam, permit me: whether it be a hardship to deny full counsel to prisoners in criminal cases, I shall not pretend to say; but if it be, 'tis a hardship of the law's making, and not of mine, nor of my lord's; and none have suffered by it (at least in our day) but those who had broken the law.

The sergeant then stopped a minute, and whispered with his junior, after which he turned to the judge. "My lord, we that are of counsel for the Crown, desire to do nothing that is hard where a person's life is at stake. We yield to the prisoner any indulgence for which your lordship can find a precedent in your reading, but no more; and so we leave the matter to you."

The Clerk of Arraigns. Crier, proclaim silence.

The Crier. Oyez! oyez! oyez! His Majesty's justices do straitly charge all manner of persons to keep silence on pain of imprisonment.

The Judge. Prisoner, what my brother Wiltshire says, the law is clear in: there is no precedent for what you ask, and the contrary practice stares us in the face for centuries. What seems to you a partial practice, and, to be frank, some learned persons are of your mind, must be set against this, that in capital cases the burden of proof lies on the Crown, and not on the accused. Also it is my duty to give you all the assistance I can, and that I shall do. Thus then it is: you can be allowed counsel to examine your own witnesses, and cross-examine the witnesses for the Crown, and speak to points of law, to be started by yourself, but no further.

He then asked her what gentleman there present he should assign to her for counsel.

Her reply to this inquiry took the whole court by surprise, and made her solicitor, Houseman, very miserable. "None, my lord," said she. "Half justice is injustice; and I will lend it no color. I will not set able men to fight for me, with their hands tied, against men as able whose hands be free. Counsel, on terms so partial, I will have none. My counsel shall be three, and no more. Yourself, my lord, — my innocence, — and the Lord God Omniscient."

These words, grandly uttered, caused a dead silence in the court, but only for a few moments. It was broken by the loud mechanical voice of the crier, who proclaimed silence, and then called the names of the jury that were to try this cause.

Mrs. Gaunt listened keenly to the names: familiar and bourgeois names, that now seemed regal, for they who owned them held her life in their hands.

Each juryman was sworn in the grand old form, now slightly curtailed.

"Joseph King, look upon the prisoner. You shall well and truly try, and true deliverance make, between our sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, whom you shall have in charge, and a true verdict give, according to the evidence. So help you God."

Mr. Whitworth, for the Crown, then opened the case, but did little more than translate the indictment into more rational language.

He sat down, and Sergeant Wiltshire addressed the court somewhat after this fashion: —

"May it please your lordship, and you, gentlemen of the jury, this is a case of great expectation and importance. The prisoner at the bar, a gentlewoman by birth and education, and, as you must have already perceived,

by breeding also, stands indicted for no less a crime than murder.

"I need not paint to you the heinousness of this crime: you have but to consult your own breasts. Who ever saw the ghastly corpse of the victim weltering in its blood, and did not feel his own blood run cold through his veins? Has the murderer fled? with what eagerness do we pursue! with what zeal apprehend! with what joy do we bring him to justice! Even the dreadful sentence of death does not shock us, when pronounced upon him; we hear it with solemn satisfaction, and acknowledge the justice of the divine sentence, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'

"But if this be the case in every common murder, what shall be thought of her who has murdered her husband? the man in whose arms she has lain, and whom she has sworn at God's altar to love and cherish. Such a murderer is a robber as well as an assassin; for she robs her own children of their father, that tender parent, who can never be replaced in this world.

"Gentlemen, it will, I fear, be proved that the prisoner at the bar hath been guilty of murder in this high degree; and, though I will endeavor rather to extenuate than to aggravate, yet I trust (*sic*) I have such a history to open as will shock the ears of all who hear me.

"Mr. Griffith Gaunt, the unfortunate deceased, was a man of descent and worship. As to his character, it was inoffensive: he was known as a worthy kindly gentleman, deeply attached to her who now stands accused of his murder. They lived happily together for some years, but, unfortunately, there was a thorn in the rose of their wedded life: he was of the Church of England: she was, and is, a Roman Catholic. This led to disputes, and no wonder, since the same unhappy difference hath more than once embroiled a nation, let alone a single family.

"Well, gentlemen, about a year ago there was a more violent quarrel than usual between the deceased and the prisoner at the bar; and the deceased left his home for several months.

"He returned upon a certain day in this year, and a reconciliation, real or apparent, took place. He left home again soon afterwards, but only for a short period. On the 15th of last October he suddenly returned for good, as he intended: and here begins the tragedy, to which what I have hitherto related was but the prologue.

"Scarce an hour before he came, one Thomas Leicester entered the house. Now this Thomas Leicester was a creature of the prisoner's. He had been her game-keeper, and was now a peddler. It was the prisoner who set him up as a peddler, and purchased the wares to start him in his trade.

"Gentlemen, this peddler, as I shall prove, was concealed in the house when the deceased arrived. One Caroline Ryder, who is the prisoner's gentlewoman, was the person who first informed her of Leicester's arrival, and it seems she was much moved; Mrs. Ryder will tell you she fell into hysterics. But soon after her husband's arrival was announced, and then the passion was of a very different kind. So violent was her rage against this unhappy man, that for once she forgot all prudence, and threatened his life before a witness. Yes, gentlemen, we shall prove that this gentlewoman, who in appearance and manners might grace a court, was so transported out of her usual self that she held up a knife, — a knife, gentlemen, and vowed to put it into her husband's heart. And this was no mere temporary ebullition of wrath: we shall see presently that, long after she had time to cool, she repeated this menace to the unfortunate man's face. The first threat, however, was uttered in her own bedroom, before her confidential servant, Caroline Ryder

aforesaid. But now the scene shifts. She has, to all appearance, recovered herself, and sits smiling at the head of her table; for, you must know, she entertained company that night, — persons of the highest standing in the county.

"Presently her husband, all unconscious of the terrible sentiments she entertained towards him, and the fearful purpose she had announced, enters the room, makes obeisance to his guests, and goes to take his wife's hand.

"What does she? She draws back with so strange a look and such forbidding words, that the company were disconcerted. Consternation fell on all present; and, ere long, they made their excuses, and left the house. Thus the prisoner was left alone with her husband. But, meantime, curiosity had been excited by her strange conduct, and some of the servants, with foreboding hearts, listened at the door of the dining-room. What did they hear, gentlemen? A furious quarrel, in which, however, the deceased was comparatively passive, and the prisoner again threatened his life, with vehemence. Her passion, it is clear, had not cooled.

"Now it may fairly be alleged, on behalf of the prisoner, that the witnesses for the Crown were on one side of the door, the prisoner and the deceased on the other, and that such evidence should be received with caution. I grant this — where it is not sustained by other circumstances, or by direct proofs. Let us then give the prisoner the benefit of this doubt, and let us inquire how the deceased himself understood her; he who not only heard the words and the accents, but saw the looks, whatever they were, that accompanied them.

"Gentlemen, he was a man of known courage and resolution; yet he was found after this terrible interview, much cowed and dejected. He spoke to Mrs. Ryder of his death as an event not far distant, and so went to his

bedroom in a melancholy and foreboding state; and where was that bedroom? He was thrust by his wife's orders into a small chamber, and not allowed to enter hers; he, the master of the house, her husband, and her lord.

"But his interpretation of the prisoner's words did not end there. He left us a further comment by his actions next ensuing. He dared not (I beg pardon, this is my inference; receive it as such), he *did* not, remain in that house a single night. He bolted his chamber-door inside; and in the very dead of night, notwithstanding the fatigues of the day's journey (for he had ridden some distance), he let himself out by the window, and reached the ground safely, though it was a height of fourteen feet; a leap, gentlemen, that few of us would venture to take. But what will not men risk when destruction is at their heels? He did not wait even to saddle his horse, but fled on foot. Unhappy man, he fled from danger, and met his death.

"From the hour when he went up to bed none of the inmates of the house ever saw Griffith Gaunt alive; but one Thomas Hayes, a laborer, saw him walking in a certain direction at one o'clock that morning; and behind him, gentlemen, there walked another man.

"Who was that other man?

"When I have told you (and this is an essential feature of the case) how the prisoner was employed during the time that her husband lay quaking in his little room, waiting an opportunity to escape; when I tell you this, I fear you will divine who it was that followed the deceased, and for what purpose.

"Gentlemen, when the prisoner had threatened her husband in person, as I have described, she retired to her own room, but not to sleep. She ordered her maid, Mrs. Ryder, to bring Thomas Leicester to her chamber. Yes, gentlemen, she received this peddler at midnight in her bed-chamber.

"Now, an act so strange as this admits, I think, of but two interpretations. Either she had a guilty amour with this fellow, or she had some extraordinary need of his services. Her whole character, by consent of the witnesses, renders it very improbable that she would descend to a low amour. Moreover she acted too publicly in the matter. The man, as we know, was her tool, her creature; she had bought his wares for him, and set him up as a peddler. She openly summoned him to her presence, and kept him there about half an hour.

"He went from her, and very soon after is seen, by Thomas Hayes, following Griffith Gaunt — at one o'clock in the morning — that Griffith Gaunt, who, after that hour, was never seen alive.

"Gentlemen, up to this point the evidence is clear, connected, and cogent; but it rarely happens in cases of murder that any human eye sees the very blow struck. The penalty is too severe for such an act to be done in the presence of an eye-witness; and not one murderer in ten could be convicted without the help of circumstantial evidence.

"The next link, however, is taken up by an ear-witness, and, in some cases, the ear is even better than the eye; for instance, as to the discharge of firearms, for, by the eye alone, we could not positively tell whether a pistol had gone off or had but flashed in the pan. Well, then, gentlemen, a few minutes after Mr. Gaunt was last seen alive, which was by Thomas Hayes, Mrs. Ryder, who had retired to her bedroom, heard the said Gaunt distinctly cry for help; she also heard a pistol-shot discharged. This took place by the side of a lake or large pond near the house, called 'the mere.' Mrs. Ryder alarmed the house, and she and the other servants proceeded to her master's room; they found it bolted from the inside. They broke it open. Mr. Gaunt had escaped by the window, as I have already told you.

"Presently in comes the prisoner from out of doors. This is at one o'clock in the morning. Now she appears to have seen at once that she must explain her being abroad at that time, so she told Mrs. Ryder that she had been out — praying."

(Here some people laughed harshly, but were threatened severely, and silenced.)

"Is that credible? Do people go out of doors at one o'clock in the morning, to pray? Nay, but I fear it was to do an act that years of prayer and penitence cannot efface.

"From that moment Mr. Gaunt was seen no more among living men. And what made his disappearance the more mysterious was that he had actually at this time just inherited largely from his namesake Mr. Gaunt of Coggleswade; and his own interest, and that of the other legatees, required his immediate presence. Mr. Atkins, the testator's solicitor, advertised for this unfortunate gentleman; but he did not appear to claim his fortune. Then plain men began to put this and that together, and cried out 'foul play!'

"Justice was set in motion at last; but embarrassed by the circumstance that the body of the deceased could not be found.

"At last, Mr. Atkins, the solicitor, being unable to get the estate I have mentioned administered, for want of proof of Griffith Gaunt's decease, entered heartily into this affair on mere civil grounds. He asked the prisoner, before several witnesses, if she would permit him to drag that piece of water by the side of which Mr. Gaunt was heard to cry for help, and, after that, seen no more.

"The prisoner did not reply; but Mr. Houseman, her solicitor, a very worthy man, who has, I believe, or had, up to that moment, a sincere conviction of her innocence,

answered for her, and told Mr. Atkins he was welcome to drag or drain it. Then the prisoner said nothing. She fainted away.

"After this, you may imagine with what expectation the water was dragged. Gentlemen, after hours of fruitless labor, a body was found.

"But here an unforeseen circumstance befriended the prisoner. It seems that piece of water swarms with enormous pike and other ravenous fish. These had so horribly mutilated the deceased, that neither form nor feature remained to swear by; and, as the law wisely and humanely demands that in these cases a body shall be identified beyond doubt, justice bade fair to be baffled again. But lo! as often happens in case of murder, Providence interposed and pointed with unerring finger to a slight but infallible mark. The deceased gentleman was known to have a large mole over his left temple. It had been noticed by his servants and his neighbors. Well, gentlemen, the greedy fish had spared this mole; spared it perhaps by His command who bade the whale swallow Jonah, yet not destroy him. There it was, clear and infallible. It was examined by several witnesses; it was recognized; it completed that chain of evidence, some of it direct, some of it circumstantial, which I have laid before you very briefly, and every part of which I shall now support by credible witnesses."

He called thirteen witnesses, including Mr. Atkins, Thomas Hayes, Jane Bannister, Caroline Ryder, and others, and their evidence in chief bore out every positive statement the counsel had made.

In cross-examining these witnesses Mrs. Gaunt took a line that agreeably surprised the court. It was not for nothing she had studied a hundred trials with a woman's observation and patient docility. She had found out

how badly people plead their own causes, and had noticed the reasons, one of which is that they say too much, and stray from the point. The line she took, with one exception, was keen brevity.

She cross-examined Thomas Hayes as follows.

CHAPTER XLII.

"You say the peddler was a hundred yards behind my husband. Which of the two men was walking fastest?"

Thomas Hayes considered a moment. "Well, I think the squire was walking rather the smartest of the two."

"Did the peddler seem likely to overtake him?"

"Nay. Ye see, dame, squire he walked straight on; but the peddler he took both sides of the road at onst, as the saying is."

The Prisoner. Forgive me, Thomas, but I don't know what you mean.

Hayes (compassionately). How should ye? You are never the worse for liquor, the likes of you.

The Prisoner (very keenly). Oh, he was in liquor, was he?

Hayes. Come, dame, you do brew good ale at Hernshaw Castle. Ye needn't go to deny that; for, Lord knows, 'tis no sin; and a poor fellow may be jolly, yet not to say drunk.

The Judge (sternly). Witness, attend, and answer directly.

The Prisoner. Nay, my lord, 'tis a plain country body, and means no ill. Good Thomas, be so much my friend as to answer plainly. Was the man drunk or sober?

Hayes. All I know is, he went from one side of the road to t'other.

The Prisoner. Thomas Hayes, as you hope to be saved eternally, was the peddler drunk or sober?

Hayes. Well, if I must tell on my neighbor or else

be damned, then that there peddler was as drunk as a lord.

Here, notwithstanding the nature of the trial, the laughter was irrepressible, and Mrs. Gaunt sat quietly down (for she was allowed a seat), and said no more.

To the surgeon, who had examined the body officially, she put this question: "Did you find any signs of violence?"

The Surgeon. None whatever; but then, there was nothing to go by, except the head and the bones.

The Prisoner. Have you experience in this kind? I mean, have you inspected murdered bodies?

The Surgeon. Yes.

The Prisoner. How many?

The Surgeon. Two before this.

The Prisoner. Oh! pray, pray, do not say "before this;" I have great hopes no murder at all hath been committed here. Let us keep to plain cases. Please you, describe the injuries in those two undoubted cases.

The Surgeon. In Wellyn's the skull was fractured in two places. In Sherrett's the right arm was broken, and there were some contusions on the head; but the cause of death was a stab that penetrated the lungs.

The Prisoner. Suppose Wellyn's murderers had thrown his body into the water, and the fishes had so mutilated it as they have this one, could you by your art have detected the signs of violence?

The Surgeon. Certainly. The man's skull was fractured. Wellyn's I mean.

The Prisoner. I put the same question with regard to Sherrett's.

The Surgeon. I cannot answer it; here the lungs were devoured by the fishes. No signs of lesion can be detected in an organ that has ceased to exist.

The Prisoner. This is too partial. Why select one

injury out of several? What I ask is this: could you have detected violence in Sherrett's case, although the fishes had eaten the flesh of his body?

The Surgeon. I answer that the minor injuries of Sherrett would have been equally perceptible; to wit, the bruises on the head, and the broken arm; but not the perforation of the lungs; and that it was killed the man.

Prisoner. Then, so far as you know, and can swear, about murder, more blows have always been struck than one, and some of the blows struck in Sherrett's case and Wellyn's would have left traces that fishes' teeth could not efface?

The Surgeon. That is so, if I am to be peevishly confined to my small and narrow experience of murdered bodies. But my general knowledge of the many ways in which life may be taken by violence —

The judge stopped him, and said that in a case of blood, that could hardly be admitted as evidence against his actual experience.

The prisoner put a drawing of the castle, the mere, and the bridge into the witnesses' hands, and elicited that it was correct, and also the distances marked on it. They had, in fact, been measured exactly for her.

The hobnailed shoes were produced, and she made some use of them, particularly in cross-examining Jane Bannister.

Prisoner. Look at those shoes. Saw you ever the like on Mr. Gaunt's feet?

Jane. That I never did, dame.

Prisoner. What, not when he came into the kitchen on the 15th October?

Jane. Nay, he was booted. By the same token I saw the boy a-cleaning of them for supper.

Prisoner. Those boots, when you broke into his room, did you find them?

Jane. Nay, when the man went, his boots went, as reason was. We found nought of his but a soiled glove.

Prisoner. Had the peddler boots on?

Jane. Alas! who ever seed a booted peddler?

Prisoner. Had he these very shoes on? Look at them.

Jane. I couldn't say for that. He had shoon, for they did properly clatter on my bricks.

The Judge. Clatter on her bricks? What does she mean?

Prisoner. I think she means on the floor of her kitchen. 'Tis a brick floor, if I remember right.

The Judge. Good woman, say, is that what you mean?

Jane. Ay, an't please you, my lord.

Prisoner. Had the peddler a mole on his forehead?

Jane. Not that I know on. I never took so much notice of the man. But la, dame, now I look at you, I don't believe you was ever the one to murder our master.

Wiltshire. We don't want your opinion. Confine yourself to facts.

Prisoner. You heard me rating my husband on that night; what was it I said about the constables — do you remember?

Jane. La, dame, I wouldn't ask that, if I was in your place.

Prisoner. I am much obliged to you for your advice; but answer me — truly.

Jane. Well, if you will have it, I think you said they should be here in the morning. But, indeed, good gentlemen, her bark was always worse than her bite, poor soul.

The Judge. Here. That meant at Hernshaw Castle, I presume.

Jane. Ay, my lord, an if it please your lordship's honor's worship.

Mrs. Gaunt, husbanding the patience of the court, put no questions at all to several witnesses; but she cross-examined Mrs. Ryder very closely. This was necessary; for Ryder was a fatal witness. Her memory had stored every rash and hasty word the poor lady had uttered, and, influenced either by animosity or prejudice, she put the worst color on every suspicious circumstance. She gave her damnatory evidence neatly, and clearly, and with a seeming candor and regret that disarmed suspicion.

When her examination in chief concluded, there was but one opinion amongst the bar, and the auditors in general, viz., that the maid had hung the mistress.

Mrs. Gaunt herself felt she had a terrible antagonist to deal with, and, when she rose to cross-examine her, she looked paler than she had done all through the trial.

She rose, but seemed to ask herself how to begin; and her pallor and her hesitation, while they excited some little sympathy, confirmed the unfavorable impression. She fixed her eyes upon the witness's, as if to discover where she was most vulnerable. Mrs. Ryder returned her gaze calmly. The court was hushed; for it was evident a duel was coming between two women of no common ability.

The opening rather disappointed expectation. Mrs. Gaunt seemed, by her manner, desirous to propitiate the witness.

Prisoner (very civilly). You say you brought Thomas Leicester to my bedroom on that terrible night?

Ryder (civilly). Yes, madam.

Prisoner. And you say he stayed there half an hour?

Ryder. Yes, madam; he did.

Prisoner. May I inquire how you know he stayed just half an hour?

Ryder. My watch told me that, madam. I brought

him to you at a quarter past eleven; and you did not ring for me till a quarter to twelve.

Prisoner. And, when I did ring for you, what then?

Ryder. I came and took the man away, by your orders.

Prisoner. At a quarter to twelve?

Ryder. At a quarter to twelve.

Prisoner. This Leicester was a lover of yours?

Ryder. Not he.

Prisoner. Oh, fie! Why, he offered you marriage; it went so far as that.

Ryder. Oh, that was before you set him up peddler.

Prisoner. 'Twas so, but he was single for your sake, and he renewed his offer that very night. Come, do not forswear yourself about a trifle.

Ryder. Trifle, indeed! Why, if he did, what has that to do with the murder? You'll do yourself no good, madam, by going about so.

Wiltshire. Really, madam, this is beside the mark.

Prisoner. If so, it can do your case no harm. My lord, you did twice interrupt the learned counsel, and forbade him to lead his witnesses; I not once, for I am for stopping no mouths, but sifting all to the bottom. Now, I implore you to let me have fair play in my turn, and an answer from this slippery witness.

The Judge. Prisoner, I do not quite see your drift; but God forbid you should be hampered in your defence. Witness, by virtue of your oath, reply directly. Did this peddler offer you marriage that night after he left the prisoner?

Ryder. My lord, he did.

Prisoner. And confided to you he had orders to kill Mr. Gaunt?

Ryder. Not he, madam; that was not the way to win *me.*

Prisoner. What! did not his terrible purpose peep out all the time he was making love to you?

No reply.

Prisoner. You had the kitchen to your two selves? Come, don't hesitate.

Ryder. The other servants were gone to bed. You kept the man so late.

Prisoner. Oh, I mean no reflection on your prudence. You went out of doors with your wooer; just to see him off?

Ryder. Not I. What for? *I* had nobody to make away with. I just opened the door for him, bolted it after him, and went straight to my bedroom.

Prisoner. How long had you been there when you heard the cry for help?

Ryder. Scarce ten minutes. I had not taken my stays off.

Prisoner. If you and Thomas Hayes speak true, that gives half an hour you were making love with the murderer after he left me. Am I correct?

The witness now saw whither she had been led, and changed her manner: she became sullen, and watched an opportunity to stab.

Prisoner. Had he a mole on his brow?

Ryder. Not that I know of.

Prisoner. Why, where were your eyes, then, when the murderer saluted you at parting?

Ryder's eyes flashed; but she felt her temper tried; and governed it all the more severely. She treated the question with silent contempt.

Prisoner. But you pass for a discreet woman; perhaps you looked modestly down when the assassin saluted you?

Ryder. *If* he saluted me, *perhaps* I did.

Prisoner. In that case, you could not see his mole;

but you must have noticed his shoes. Were these the shoes he wore? Look at them well.

Ryder (after inspecting them). I do not recognize them.

Prisoner. Will you swear these were not the shoes he had on?

Ryder. How can I swear that? I know nothing about the man's shoes. If you please, my lord, am I to be kept here all day, with her foolish trifling questions?

The Judge. All day, and all night too, if justice requires it. The law is not swift to shed blood.

Prisoner. My lord and the gentlemen of the jury were here before you, and will be kept here after you. Prithee attend. Look at that drawing of Hernshaw Castle and Hernshaw Mere. Now take this pencil, and mark your bedroom on the drawing.

The pencil was taken from the prisoner and handed to Ryder. She waited like a cat till it came close to her; then recoiled with an admirable scream. "Me handle a thing hot from the hand of a murderess! It makes me tremble all over."

This cruel stab affected the prisoner visibly. She put her hand to her bosom, and with tears in her eyes faltered out a request to the judge that she might sit down a minute.

The Judge. To be sure you may. And you, my good woman, must not run before the court. How do you know what evidence she might have in store? At present we have only heard one side. Be more moderate.

The prisoner rose promptly to her feet. "My lord, I welcome the insult that has disgusted your lordship and the gentlemen of the jury, and won me those good words of comfort." To Ryder: "What sort of a night was it?"

Ryder. Very little moon, but a clear, starry night.

Prisoner. Could you see the mere, and the banks?

Ryder. Nay, but so much of it as faced my window.

Prisoner. Have you marked your window?

Ryder. I have.

Prisoner. Now mark the place where you heard Mr Gaunt cry for help.

Ryder. 'Twas about here; under these trees. And that is why I could not see him; along of the shadow.

Prisoner. Possibly. Did you see me on that side the mere?

Ryder. No.

Prisoner. What colored dress had I on at that time?

Ryder. White satin.

Prisoner. Then you could have seen me, even among the trees, had I been on that side the Mere?

Ryder. I can't say. However, I never said you were on the very spot where the deed was done; but you were out of doors.

Prisoner. How do you know that?

Ryder. Why, you told me so yourself.

Prisoner. Then that is my evidence, not yours. Swear to no more than you know. Had my husband, to your knowledge, a reason for absconding suddenly?

Ryder. Yes, he had.

Prisoner. What was it?

Ryder. Fear of you.

Prisoner. Nay, I mean, had he not something to fear — something quite different from that I am charged with?

Ryder. You know best, madam. I would gladly serve you, but I cannot guess what you are driving at.

The prisoner was taken aback by this impudent reply. She hesitated to force her servant to expose a husband whom she believed to be living: and her hesitation looked like discomfiture; and Ryder was victorious in that encounter.

By this time they were both thoroughly embittered, and it was war to the knife.

Prisoner. You listened to our unhappy quarrel that night?

Ryder. Quarrel, madam! 'twas all on one side.

Prisoner. How did you understand what I said to him about the constables?

Ryder. Constables! I never heard you say the word.

Prisoner. Oh!

Ryder. Neither when you threatened him with your knife to me; nor when you threatened him to his face.

Prisoner. Take care: you forget that Jane Bannister heard me; was her ear nearer the keyhole than yours?

Ryder. Jane! she is a simpleton. You could make her think she heard anything. I noticed you put the words in her mouth.

Prisoner. God forgive you, you naughty woman. You had better have spoken the truth.

Ryder. My lord, if you please, am I to be miscalled — by a murderess?

The Judge. Come, come, this is no place for recrimination.

The prisoner now stooped and examined her papers, and took a distinct line of cross-examination.

Prisoner (with apparent carelessness). At all events, you are a virtuous woman, Mrs. Ryder?

Ryder. Yes, madam, as virtuous as yourself, to say the least.

Prisoner (still more carelessly). Married or single?

Ryder. Single, and like to be.

Prisoner. Yes, if I remember right, I made a point of that before I engaged you as my maid.

Ryder. I believe the question was put.

Prisoner. Here is the answer in your handwriting. Is not that your handwriting?

Ryder (after inspecting it). It is.

Prisoner. You came highly recommended by your last mistress, a certain Mrs. Hamilton. Here is her letter, describing you as a model.

Ryder. Well, madam, hitherto I have given satisfaction to all my mistresses, Mrs. Hamilton among the rest. My character does not rest on her word only, I hope.

Prisoner. Excuse me; I engaged you on her word only. Now, who is this Mrs. Hamilton?

Ryder. A worshipful lady I served for eight months before I came to you. She went abroad, or I should be with her now.

Prisoner. Now cast your eye over this paper.

It was the copy of a marriage certificate between Thomas Edwards and Caroline Plunkett.

"Who is this Caroline Plunkett?"

Ryder turned very pale, and made no reply.

"I ask you, who is this Caroline Plunkett?"

Ryder (faintly). Myself.

The Judge. Why, you said you were single.

Ryder. So I am; as good as single. My husband and me we parted eight years ago, and I have never seen him since.

Prisoner. Was it quite eight years ago?

Ryder. Nearly; 'twas in May, 1739.

Prisoner. But you have lived with him since?

Ryder. Never, upon my soul!

Prisoner. When was your child born?

Ryder. My child! I have none.

Prisoner. In January, 1743, you left a baby at Biggleswade, with a woman called Church — did you not?

Ryder (panting). Of course I did. It was my sister's.

Prisoner. Do you mean to call God to witness that child was not yours?

Ryder hesitated.

Prisoner. Will you swear Mrs. Church did not see you nurse that child in secret, and weep over it?

At this question the perspiration stood visible on Ryder's brow, her cheeks were ghastly, and her black eyes roved like some wild animal's round the court. She saw her own danger, and had no means of measuring her inquisitor's information.

"My lord, have pity on me. I was betrayed, abandoned. Why am I so tormented? *I* have not committed murder." So, cat-like, she squealed and scratched at once.

Prisoner. What! to swear away an innocent life, is not that murder?

The Judge. Prisoner, we make allowances for your sex and your peril, but you must not remark on the evidence at present. Examine as severely as you will, but abstain from comment till you address the jury on your defence.

Sergeant Wiltshire. My lord, I submit that this line of examination is barbarous, and travels out of the case entirely.

Prisoner. Not so, Mr. Sergeant. 'Tis done by advice of an able lawyer. My life is in peril unless I shake this witness's credit. To that end I show you she is incontinent, and practised in falsehood. Unchastity has been held in these courts to disqualify a female witness, hath it not, my lord?

The Judge. Hardly. But to disparage her evidence it has. And wisely; for she who loses her virtue enters on a life of deceit; and lying is a habit that spreads from one thing to many. Much wisdom there is in ancient words. Our forefathers taught us to call a virtuous woman an honest woman, and the law does but follow in that track; still, however, leaving much to the discretion of the jury.

Prisoner. I would show her more mercy than she has shown to me. Therefore I leave that matter. Witness, be so good as to examine Mrs. Hamilton's letter, and compare it with your own. The *v*'s and the *s*'s are peculiar in both, and yet the same. Come, confess; Mrs. Hamilton's is a forgery. You wrote it. Be pleased to hand both letters up to my lord to compare; the disguise is but thin.

Ryder. Forgery there was none. There is no Mrs. Hamilton. (She burst into tears.) I had my child to provide for, and no man to help me! What was I to do? A servant must live.

Prisoner. Then why not let her mistress live, whose bread she has eaten? My lord, shall not this false witness be sent hence to prison for perjury?

Wiltshire. Certainly not. What woman on earth is expected to reveal her own shame upon oath? 'Twas not fair nor human to put such questions. Come, madam, leave torturing this poor creature. Show some mercy; you may need it yourself.

Prisoner. Sir, 'tis not mercy I ask, but justice according to law. But, since you do me the honor to make me a request, I will comply, and ask her but one question more. Describe my apartment into which you showed Thomas Leicester that night. Begin at the outer door.

Ryder. First there is the ante-room; then the boudoir; then there's your bed-chamber.

Prisoner. Into which of those three did you show Thomas Leicester?

Ryder. Into the ante-room.

Prisoner. Then why did you say it was in my chamber I entertained him?

Ryder. Madam, I meant no more than that it was your private apartment up-stairs.

Prisoner. You contrived to make the gentlemen think otherwise.

The Judge. That you did. 'Tis down in my notes that she received the peddler in her bed-chamber.

Ryder (sobbing). God is my witness I did not mean to mislead your lordship: and I ask my lady's pardon for not being more exact in that particular.

At this the prisoner bowed to the judge, and sat down with one victorious flash of her gray eye at the witness, who was in an abject condition of fear, and hung all about the witness-box limp as a wet towel.

Sergeant Wiltshire saw she was so thoroughly cowed she would be apt to truckle, and soften her evidence to propitiate the prisoner; so he asked her but one question.

"Were you and the prisoner on good terms?"

Ryder. On the best of terms. She was always a good and liberal mistress to me.

Wiltshire. I will not prolong your sufferings. You may go down.

The Judge. But you will not leave the court till this trial is ended. I have grave doubts whether I ought not to commit you.

Unfortunately for the prisoner, Ryder was not the last witness for the Crown. The others that followed were so manifestly honest that it would have been impolitic to handle them severely. The prisoner, therefore, put very few questions to them; and, when the last witness went down, the case looked very formidable.

The evidence for the Crown being now complete, the judge retired for some refreshment; and the court buzzed like a hum of bees. Mrs. Gaunt's lips and throat were parched; and her heart quaked.

A woman of quite the lower order thrust forth a great arm, and gave her an orange. Mrs. Gaunt thanked her sweetly: and the juice relieved her throat.

Also this bit of sympathy was of good omen, and did her heart good.

She buried her face in her hands, and collected all her powers for the undertaking before her. She had noted down the exact order of her topics, but no more.

The judge returned; the crier demanded silence; and the prisoner rose, and turned her eyes modestly but steadily upon those who held her life in their hands: and, true to the wisdom of her sex, the first thing she aimed at was — to please.

"My lord, and you gentlemen of the jury, I am now to reply to a charge of murder, founded on a little testimony, and a good deal of false, but, I must needs say, reasonable conjecture.

"I am innocent; but, unlike other innocent persons who have stood before me, I have no man to complain of.

"The magistrates who committed me proceeded with due caution and humanity: they weighed my hitherto unspotted reputation, and were in no hurry to prejudge me; here, in this court, I have met with much forbearance; the learned counsel for the Crown has made me groan under his abilities; that was his duty; but he said from the first he would do nothing hard, and he has kept his word; often he might have stopped me; I saw it in his face: but, being a gentleman and a Christian, as well as a learned lawyer, methinks he said to himself, 'This is a poor gentlewoman pleading for her life; let her have some little advantage.' As for my lord, he has promised to be my counsel, so far as his high station, and duty to the Crown, admit; and he has supported and consoled me more than once with words of justice, that would not, I think, have encouraged a guilty person, but have comforted and sustained me beyond expression. So then I stand here, the victim, not of man's injustice, but of deceitful appearances, and of honest but hasty and loose conjectures.

"These conjectures I shall now sift, and hope to show you how hollow they are.

"Gentlemen, in every disputed matter the best way, I am told, is to begin by settling what both parties are agreed in, and so to narrow the matter. To use that way, then, I do heartily agree with the learned counsel that murder is a heinous crime, and that, black as it is at the best, yet it is still more detestable when 'tis a wife that murders her husband, and robs her child of a parent who can never be replaced.

"I also agree with him that circumstantial evidence is often sufficient to convict a murderer; and, indeed, were it not so, that most monstrous of crimes would go oftenest unpunished: since, of all culprits, murderers do most shun the eyes of men in their dark deeds, and so provide beforehand that direct testimony to their execrable crime there shall be none. Only herein I am advised to take a distinction that escaped the learned sergeant; I say that first of all it ought to be proved directly, and to the naked eye, that a man has been murdered; and then, if none saw the crime done, let circumstances point out the murderer.

"But here, they put the cart before the horse; they find a dead body, with no marks of violence whatever; and labor to prove by circumstantial evidence alone that this mere dead body is a murdered body. This, I am advised, is bad in law, and contrary to general precedents; and the particular precedents for it are not examples, but warnings; since both the prisoners so rashly convicted were proved innocent, after their execution."

(The judge took a note of this distinction.)

"Then, to go from principles to the facts, I agree and admit that, in a moment of anger, I was so transported out of myself as to threaten my husband's life before Caroline Ryder. But afterwards, when I saw him face

to face, then, that I threatened him with *violence*, that I deny. The fact is, I had just learned that he had committed a capital offence: and what I threatened him with was the law. This was proved by Jane Bannister. She says she heard me say the constables should come for him next morning. For what? to murder him?"

The Judge. Give me leave, madam. Shall you prove Mr. Gaunt had committed a capital offence?

Prisoner. I could, my lord; but I am loath to do it. For if I did, I should cast him into worse trouble than I am in myself.

The Judge (shaking his head gravely). Let me advise you to advance nothing you are not able and willing to prove.

Prisoner. Then, I confine myself to this: it was proved by a witness for the Crown that in the dining-room I threatened my husband to his face with the law. Now this threat, and not that other extravagant threat, which he never heard, you know, was clearly the threat which caused him to abscond that night.

"In the next place, I agree with the learned counsel that I was out of doors at one o'clock that morning. But if he will use me as HIS WITNESS in that matter, then he must not pick and choose and mutilate my testimony. Nay, let him take the whole truth, and not just so much as he can square with the indictment. Either believe me, that I was out of doors praying, or do not believe me that I was out of doors at all.

"Gentlemen, hear the simple truth. You may see in the map, on the south side of Hernshaw Castle, a grove of large fir-trees. 'Tis a reverend place, most fit for prayer and meditation. Here I have prayed a thousand times and more before the fifteenth October. Hence 'tis called 'the Dame's Haunt,' as I shall prove, that am the dame 'tis called after.

"Let it not seem incredible to you that I should pray out of doors in my grove, on a fine clear starry night. For aught I know, Protestants may pray only by the fireside. But, remember, I am a Catholic. We are not so contracted in our praying. We do not confine it to little comfortable places. Nay, but for seventeen hundred years and more we have prayed out of doors as much as in doors. And this our custom is no fit subject for a shallow sneer. How does the learned sergeant know that, beneath the vault of heaven at night, studded with those angelic eyes, the stars, is an unfit place to bend the knee, and raise the soul in prayer? Has he ever tried it?"

This sudden appeal to a learned and eminent, but by no means devotional, sergeant, so tickled the gentlemen of the bar, that they burst out laughing with singular unanimity.

This dashed the prisoner, who had not intended to be funny; and she hesitated, and looked distressed.

The Judge. Proceed, madam; these remarks of yours are singular, but quite pertinent, and no fit subject for ridicule. Gentlemen, remember the public looks to you for an example.

Prisoner. My lord, 'twas my fault for making that personal which should be general. But women they are so. 'Tis our foible. I pray the good sergeant to excuse me.

"I say, then, generally, that when the sun retires, then earth fades, but heaven comes out in tenfold glory: and I say the starry firmament at night is a temple not built with hands, and the bare sight of it subdues the passions, chastens the heart, and aids the soul in prayer surprisingly. My lord, as I am a Christian woman, 'tis true that my husband had wronged me cruelly and broken the law. 'Tis true that I raged against him and he answered

me not again. 'Tis true, as that witness said, that my bark is worse than my bite. I cooled, and then felt I had forgotten the wife and the Christian in my wrath. I repented, and, to be more earnest in my penitence, I did go and pray out o' doors beneath those holy eyes of heaven that seemed to look down with chaste reproach on my ungoverned heat. I left my fireside, my velvet cushions, and all the little comforts made by human hands, that adorn our earthly dwellings, but distract our eyes from God."

Some applause followed this piece of eloquence, exquisitely uttered. It was checked, and the prisoner resumed, with an entire change of manner:

"Gentlemen, the case against me is like a piece of rotten wood varnished all over. It looks fair to the eye; but will not bear handling.

"As an example of what I say, take three charges on which the learned sergeant greatly relied on opening his case, —

"1st, That I received Thomas Leicester in my bedroom.

"2d, That he went hot from me after Mr. Gaunt.

"3d, That he was seen following Mr. Gaunt with a bloody intent.

"How ugly these three proofs looked at first sight! Well, but when we squeezed the witnesses ever so little, what did these three dwindle down to?

"1st, That I received Thomas Leicester in an anteroom, which leads to a boudoir, and that boudoir leads to my bedroom.

"2d, That Thomas Leicester went from me to the kitchen, and there, for a good half-hour, drank my ale (as it appears), and made love to his old sweetheart, Caroline Ryder, the false witness for the Crown; and went abroad fresh from *her*, and not from *me*.

"3d, That he was not (to speak strictly) seen following Mr. Gaunt, but just walking on the same road, drunk, and staggering, and going at such a rate that, as the Crown's own witness swore, he could hardly in the nature of things overtake Mr. Gaunt, who walked quicker, and straighter too, than he.

"So then, even if a murder has been done, they have failed to connect Thomas Leicester with it, or me with Thomas Leicester. Two broken links in a chain of but three.

"And now I come to the more agreeable part of my defence. I do think there has been no murder at all.

"There is no evidence of a murder.

"A body is found with the flesh eaten by fishes, but the bones and the head uninjured. They swear a surgeon, who has examined the body, and certainly he had the presumption to guess it looks like a murdered body. But, being sifted, he was forced to admit that, so far as his experience of murdered bodies goes, it is not like a murdered body; for there is no bone broken, nor bruise on the head.

"Where is the body found? In the water. But water by itself is a sufficient cause of death, and a common cause too; and kills without breaking bones, or bruising the head. O perversity of the wise! For every one creature murdered in England, ten are accidentally drowned; and they find a dead man in the water, which is as much as to say they find the slain in the arms of the slayer; yet they do not once suspect the water, but go about in search of a strange and monstrous crime.

"Mr. Gaunt's cry for help was heard *here*, if it was heard at all (which I greatly doubt), here by this clump of trees: the body was found here, hard by the bridge; which is, by measurement, one furlong and sixty paces from that clump of trees, as I shall prove. There is no

current in the mere lively enough to move a body, and what there is runs the wrong way. So this disconnects the cry for help, and the dead body. Another broken link!

"And now I come to my third defence, I say the body is not the body of Griffith Gaunt.

"The body, mutilated it was, had two distinguishing marks: a mole on the brow, and a pair of hobnailed shoes on the feet.

"Now the advisers of the Crown fix their eyes on that mole; but they turn their heads away from the hobnailed shoes. But why? Articles of raiment found on a body are legal evidence of identity. How often, my lord, in cases of murder, hath the Crown relied on such particulars, especially in cases where corruption had obscured the features.

"I shall not imitate this partiality, this obstinate prejudice; I shall not ask you to shut your eyes on the mole, as they do on the shoes, but shall meet the whole truth fairly.

"Mr. Gaunt went from my house, that morning, with boots on his feet, and with a mole on his brow.

"Thomas Leicester went the same road, with shoes on his feet, and, as I shall prove, with a mole on his brow.

"To be sure the Crown witnesses did not distinctly admit this mole on him; but, you will remember, they dared not deny it on their oaths, and so run their heads into an indictment for perjury.

"But, gentlemen, I shall put seven witnesses into the box, who will all swear they have known Thomas Leicester for years, and that he had a mole upon his left temple.

"One of these witnesses is — the mother that bore him.

"I shall then call witnesses to prove that, on the

fifteenth of October, the bridge over the mere was in bad repair, and a portion of the side rail gone; and that the body was found within a few yards of that defective bridge; and then, as Thomas Leicester went that way, drunk, and staggering from side to side, you may reasonably infer that he fell into the water in passing the bridge. To show you this is possible, I shall prove the same thing has actually occurred. I shall swear the oldest man in the parish, who will depose to a similar event that happened in his boyhood. He hath said it a thousand times before to-day, and now will swear it. He will tell you that on a certain day, sixty-nine years ago, the parson of Hernshaw, the Rev. Augustus Murthwaite, went to cross this bridge at night, after carousing at Hernshaw Castle with our great-grandfather, my husband's and mine, the then proprietor of Hernshaw, and tumbled into the water; and his body was found, gnawed out of the very form of humanity by the fishes, within a yard or two of the spot where poor Tom Leicester was found, that hath cost us all this trouble. So do the same causes bring round the same events in a cycle of years. The only difference is that the parson drank his death in our dining-room, and the peddler in our kitchen.

"No doubt, my lord, you have observed that sometimes a hasty and involuntary inaccuracy gives quite a wrong color to a thing. I assure you I have suffered by this. It is said that the moment Mr. Atkins proposed to drag my mere, I fainted away. In this account there is an omission. I shall prove that Mr. Atkins used these words — 'And, underneath that water, I undertake to find the remains of Griffith Gaunt.' Now, gentlemen, you shall understand that at that time, and indeed until the moment when I saw the shoes upon that poor corpse's feet, I was in great terror for my husband's life. How could it be otherwise? Caroline Ryder had told me she

heard his cry for help. He had disappeared. What was I to think? I feared he had fallen in with robbers. I feared all manner of things. So when the lawyer said so positively he would find his body, I was overpowered. Ah, gentlemen, wedded love survives many wrongs, many angry words; I love my husband still; and, when the man told me so brutally that he was certainly dead, I fainted away. I confess it. Shall I be hanged for that?

"But now, thank God, I am full of hope that he is alive, and that good hope has given me the courage to make this great effort to save my own life.

"Hitherto I have been able to contradict my accusers positively; but now I come to a mysterious circumstance that I own puzzles me. Most persons accused of murder could, if they chose, make a clean breast, and tell you the whole matter. But this is not my case. I know shoes from boots, and I know Kate Gaunt from a liar and a murderess; but, when all is said, this is still a dark mysterious business, and there are things in it I can only deal with as you do, gentlemen, by bringing my wits to bear upon them in reasonable conjecture.

"Caroline Ryder swears she heard Mr. Gaunt cry for help. And Mr. Gaunt has certainly disappeared.

"My accusers have somewhat weakened this by trying to palm off the body of Thomas Leicester on you for the body of Mr. Gaunt. But the original mystery remains, and puzzles me. I might fairly appeal to you to disbelieve the witness. She is proved incontinent, and a practised liar, and she forswore herself in this court, and my lord is in two minds about committing her. But a liar does not always lie, and, to be honest, I think she really *believes* she heard Mr. Gaunt cry for help, for she went straight to his bedroom; and that looks as if she really thought she heard his voice. But a liar may be

mistaken: do not forget that. Distance affects the voice; and I think the voice she heard was Thomas Leicester's, and the place it came from higher up the mere.

"This, my notion, will surprise you less when I prove to you that Leicester's voice bore a family likeness to Mr. Gaunt's. I shall call two witnesses who have been out shooting with Mr. Gaunt and Tom Leicester, and have heard Leicester halloo in the wood, and taken it for Mr. Gaunt.

"Must I tell you the whole truth? This Leicester has always passed for an illegitimate son of Mr. Gaunt's father. He resembled my husband in form, stature, and voice: he had the Gaunt mole, and has often spoken of it by that name. My husband forgave him many faults for no other reason — and I bought his wares and filled his pack for no other reason — than this: that he was my husband's brother by nature, though not in law. 'HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.'

"Ah, that is a royal device; yet how often in this business have the advisers of the Crown forgotten it?"

"My lord, and gentlemen of the jury, I return from these conjectures to the indisputable facts of my defence.

"Mr. Gaunt may be alive, or may be dead. He was certainly alive on the fifteenth October, and it lies on the Crown to prove him dead, and not on me to prove him alive. But, as for the body that forms the subject of this indictment, it is the body of Thomas Leicester, who was seen on the sixteenth October, at one in the morning, drunk and staggering, and making for Hernshaw bridge, which leads to his mother's house; and on all his former visits to Hernshaw Castle he went on to his mother's, as I shall prove. This time he never reached her, as I shall prove, but on his way to her did meet his death by the will of God, and no fault of man or woman, in Hernshaw Mere.

"Swear Sarah Leicester."

The Judge. I think you say you have several witnesses?

Prisoner. More than twenty, my lord.

The Judge. We cannot possibly dispose of them this evening. We will hear your evidence to-morrow. Prisoner, this will enable you to consult with your legal advisers; and let me urge upon you to prove, if you can, that Mr. Gaunt has a sufficient motive for hiding and not answering Mr. Atkins's invitation to inherit a large estate. Some such proof is necessary to complete your defence; and I am sorry to see you have made no mention of it in your address, which was otherwise able.

Prisoner. My lord, I think I can prove my own innocence without casting a slur upon my husband.

The Judge. You *think?* when your life is at stake. Be not so mad as to leave so large a hole in your defence, if you can mend it. Take *advice.*

He said this very solemnly, then rose and left the court.

Mrs. Gaunt was conveyed back to prison, and there was soon prostrated by the depression that follows an unnatural excitement.

Mr. Houseman found her on the sofa, pale and dejected, and clasping the jailer's wife convulsively, who applied hartshorn to her nostrils.

He proved but a Job's comforter. Her defence, creditable as it was to a novice, seemed wordy and weak to him, a lawyer; and he was horrified at the admissions she had made. In her place he would have admitted nothing he could not thoroughly explain.

He came to insist on a change of tactics.

When he saw her sad condition, he tried to begin by consoling and encouraging her. But his own serious misgivings unfitted him for this task, and very soon, not-

withstanding the state she was in, he was almost scolding her for being so mad as to withstand the judge, and set herself against his advice. "There," said he, "my lord kept his word, and became counsel for you. 'Close that gap in your defence,' says he, 'and you will very likely be acquitted.' 'Nay,' says you, 'I prefer to chance it.' What madness! what injustice!"

"Injustice! to whom?"

"To whom? why, to yourself."

"What, may I not be unjust to myself?"

"Certainly not; you have no right to be unjust to anybody. Don't deceive yourself; there is no virtue in this: it is mere miserable weakness. What right have you to peril an innocent life merely to screen the malefactor from just obloquy?"

"Alas!" said Mrs. Gaunt, "'tis more than obloquy. They will kill him; they will brand him with a hot iron."

"Not unless he is indicted; and who will indict him? Sir George Neville must be got to muzzle the attorney-general, and the Lancashire jade will not move against him, for you say they are living together."

"Of course they are: and, as you say, why should I screen him? But 'twill not serve; who can combat prejudice? If what I have said does not convince them, an angel's voice would not. Sir, I am a Catholic, and they will hang me. I shall die miserably, having exposed my husband, who loved me once, oh! so dearly. I trifled with his love. I deserve it all."

"You will not die at all, if you will only be good and obedient, and listen to wiser heads. I have subpœnaed Caroline Ryder as your witness, and given her a hint how to escape an indictment for perjury. You will find her supple as a glove."

"Call a rattlesnake for my witness?"

"I have drawn her fangs. You will also call Sir George

Neville, to prove he saw Gaunt's picture at the 'Pack-horse,' and heard the other wife's tale. Wiltshire will object to this as evidence; and say, why don't you produce Mercy Vint herself? Then you will call me to prove that I sent the subpœna to Mercy Vint. Come now, I cannot eat or sleep till you promise me."

Mrs. Gaunt sighed deeply. "Spare me," said she, "I am worn out. Oh that I could die before the trial begins again!"

Houseman saw the signs of yielding, and persisted. "Come, promise now," said he. "Then you will feel better."

"I will do whatever you bid me," said she. "Only, if they let me off, I will go into a convent. No power shall hinder me."

"You shall go where you like, except to the gallows. Enough, 'tis a promise, and I never knew you to break one. Now I can eat my supper. You are a good obedient child, and I am a happy attorney."

"And I am the most miserable woman in all England."

"Child," said the worthy lawyer, "your spirits have given way, because they were strung so high. You need repose. Go to bed now, and sleep twelve hours. Believe me, you will wake another woman."

"Ah! would I could!" cried Mrs. Gaunt, with all the eloquence of despair.

Houseman murmured a few more consoling words, and then left her, after once more exacting a promise that she would receive no more visits, but go to bed directly. She was to send all intruders to him at the "Angel."

Mrs. Gaunt proceeded to obey his orders, and, though it was but eight o'clock, she made preparations for bed, and then went to her nightly devotions.

She was in sore trouble; and earthly trouble turns the heart heavenwards. Yet it was not so with her. The

deep languor that oppressed her, seemed to have reached her inmost soul. Her beads, falling one by one from her hand, denoted the number of her supplications; but, for once, they were *preces sine mente dictæ*. Her faith was cold, her belief in Divine justice was shaken for a time. She began to doubt and to despond. That bitter hour, which David has sung so well, and Bunyan, from experience, has described in his biography as well as in his novel, sat heavy upon her, as it had on many a true believer before her. So deep was the gloom, so paralyzing the languor, that at last she gave up all endeavor to utter words of prayer. She placed her crucifix at the foot of the wall, and laid herself down on the ground and kissed His feet, then drawing back, gazed upon that effigy of the mortal sufferings of our Redeemer.

"O anima Christiana, respice vulnera patientis, sanguinem morientis, precem redemptionis nostræ."

She had lain thus a good half-hour, when a gentle tap came to the door.

"Who is that?" said she.

"Mrs. Menteith," the jailer's wife replied softly, and asked leave to come in.

Now this Mrs. Menteith had been very kind to her, and stoutly maintained her innocence. Mrs. Gaunt rose, and invited her in.

"Madam," said Mrs. Menteith, "what I come for, there is a person below who much desires to see you."

"I beg to be excused," was the reply. "He must go to my solicitor at the 'Angel,' Mr. Houseman."

Mrs. Menteith retired with that message, but in about five minutes returned to say that the young woman declined to go to Mr. Houseman, and begged hard to see Mrs. Gaunt. "And, dame," said she, "if I were you I'd let her come in; 'tis the honestest face, and the tears in

her soft eyes, at your denying her; 'Oh, dear, dear,' said she, 'I cannot tell my errand to any but her.'"

"Well, well," said Mrs. Gaunt; "but what is her business?"

"If you ask me, I think her business is your business. Come, dame, do see the poor thing; she is civil-spoken, and she tells me she has come all the way out of Lancashire o' purpose."

Mrs. Gaunt recoiled, as if she had been stung.

"From Lancashire?" said she faintly.

"Ay, madam," said Mrs. Menteith, "and that is a long road; and a child upon her arm all the way, poor thing."

"Her name?" said Mrs. Gaunt sternly.

"Oh, she is not ashamed of it. She gave it me directly."

"What, has she the effrontery to take my name?"

Mrs. Menteith stared at her with utter amazement. "*Your* name?" said she. "'Tis a simple country body, and her name is Vint — Mercy Vint."

Mrs. Gaunt was very much agitated, and said she felt quite unequal to see a stranger.

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what to do," said Mrs. Menteith. "She says she will lie at your door all night, but she will see you. 'Tis the face of a friend. She may know something. It seems hard to thrust her and her child out into the street after their coming all the way from Lancashire."

Mrs. Gaunt stood silent awhile, and her intelligence had a severe combat with her deep repugnance to be in the same room with Griffith Gaunt's mistress (so she considered her). But a certain curiosity came to the aid of her good sense; and after all she was a brave and haughty woman, and her natural courage began to rise. She thought to herself, "What, dare she come to me all this way, and shall I shrink from *her?*"

She turned to Mrs. Menteith with a bitter smile, and she said, very slowly, and clenching her white teeth, "Since you desire it, and she *insists* on it, I will receive Mistress Mercy Vint."

Mrs. Menteith went off, and in about five minutes returned ushering in Mercy Vint in a hood and travelling-cloak.

Mrs. Gaunt received her standing, and with a very formal courtesy, to which Mercy made a quiet obeisance, and both women looked one another all over in a moment.

Mrs. Menteith lingered, to know what on earth this was all about; but, as neither spoke a word, and their eyes were fixed on each other, she divined that her absence was necessary, and so retired slowly, looking very much amazed at both of them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"Be seated, mistress, if you please," said Mrs. Gaunt, with icy civility, "and let me know to what I owe this extraordinary visit."

"I thank you, dame," said Mercy, "for indeed I am sore fatigued." She sat quietly down. "Why have I come to you? It was to serve you, and to keep my word with George Neville."

"Will you be kind enough to explain?" said Mrs. Gaunt, in a freezing tone, and with a look of her great gray eye to match.

Mercy felt chilled, and was too frank to disguise it. "Alas," said she softly, "'tis hard to be received so, and me come all the way from Lancashire, with a heart like lead, to do my duty, God willing."

The tears stood in her eyes, and her mellow voice was sweet and patient.

The gentle remonstrance was not quite without effect. Mrs. Gaunt colored a little: she said stiffly, "Excuse me if I seem discourteous: but you and I ought not to be in one room a moment. You do not see this, apparently. But at least I have a right to insist that such an interview shall be very brief, and to the purpose. Oblige me, then, by telling me in plain terms why you have come hither."

"Madam, to be your witness at the trial."

"*You* be *my* witness?"

"Why not? If I can clear you? What, would you rather be condemned for murder, than let me show them you are innocent? Alas, how you hate me!"

"Hate you, child?" said Mrs. Gaunt, coloring to her temples: "of course I hate you. We are both of us flesh and blood, and hate one another. And one of us is honest enough, and uncivil enough, to say so."

"Speak for yourself, dame," replied Mercy quietly, "for I hate you not; and I thank God for it. To hate is to be miserable. I'd liever be hated than to hate."

Mrs. Gaunt looked at her. "Your words are goodly and wise," said she; "your face is honest; and your eyes are like a very dove's. But, for all that, you hate me quietly, with all your heart. Human nature is human nature."

"'Tis so. But grace is grace." Mercy was silent a moment, then resumed, "I'll not deny I did hate you for a time, when first I learned the man I had married had a wife, and you were she. We that be women are too unjust to each other, and too indulgent to a man. But I have worn out my hate. I wrestled in prayer, and the God of Love he did quench my most unreasonable hate. For 'twas the man betrayed me; *you* never wronged me, nor I you. But you are right, madam; 'tis true that nature without grace is black as pitch; the devil he was busy at my ear, and whispered me, 'If the fools in Cumberland hang her, what fault o' thine? Thou wilt be his lawful wife, and thy poor innocent child will be a child of shame no more.' But, by God's grace, I did defy him. And I do defy him." She rose swiftly from her chair, and her dove's eyes gleamed with celestial light. "Get thee behind me, Satan. I tell thee the hangman shall never have her innocent body, nor thou my soul."

The movement was so unexpected, the words and the look so simply noble, that Mrs. Gaunt rose too, and gazed upon her visitor with astonishment and respect — yet still with a dash of doubt.

She thought to herself, "If this creature is not sincere, what a mistress of deceit she must be!"

But Mercy Vint soon returned to her quiet self. She sat down and said gravely, and for the first time a little coldly, as one who had deserved well, and been received ill — "Mistress Gaunt, you are accused of murdering your husband. 'Tis false, for two days ago I saw him alive."

"What do you say?" cried Mrs. Gaunt, trembling all over.

"Be brave, madam; you have borne great trouble, do not give way under joy. He who has wronged us both — he who wedded you under his own name of Griffith Gaunt, and me under the false name of Thomas Leicester — is no more dead than we are; I saw him two days ago and spoke to him, and persuaded him to come to Carlisle town and do you justice."

Mrs. Gaunt fell on her knees. "He is alive. He is alive. Thank God! Oh, thank God! He is alive, and God bless the tongue that tells me so. God bless you eternally, Mercy Vint."

The tears of joy streamed down her face, and then Mercy's flowed too. She uttered a little pathetic cry of joy. "Ah," she sobbed, "the bit of comfort I needed so has come to my heavy heart. *She* has blessed me!"

But she said this very softly, and Mrs. Gaunt was in a rapture, and did not hear her.

"Is it a dream? my husband alive? and you the one to come and tell me so? How unjust I have been to you! Forgive me. Why does he not come himself?"

Mercy colored at this question, and hesitated.

"Well, dame," said she, "for one thing, he has been on the fuddle for the last two months."

"On the fuddle?"

"Ay; he owns he has never been sober a whole day.

And that takes the heart out of a man, as well as the brains. And then he has got it into his head that you will never forgive him, and that he shall be cast in prison if he shows his face in Cumberland."

"Why in Cumberland more than in Lancashire?" asked Mrs. Gaunt, biting her lip.

Mercy blushed faintly; she replied with some delicacy, but did not altogether mince the matter.

"He knows I shall never punish him for what he has done to me."

"Why not? I begin to think he has wronged you almost as much as he has me."

"Worse, madam, worse. He has robbed me of my good name. You are still his lawful wife, and none can point the finger at you. But look at me. I was an honest girl, respected by all the parish. What has he made of me? The man that lay a-dying in my house, and I saved his life, and so my heart did warm to him, he blasphemed God's altar, to deceive and betray me; and here I am, a poor forlorn creature, neither maid, wife, nor widow; with a child on my arms that I do nothing but cry over; ay, my poor innocent, I left thee down below, because I was ashamed she should see thee; ah me! ah me!" She lifted up her voice and wept.

Mrs. Gaunt looked at her wistfully; and, like Mercy before her, had a bitter struggle with human nature: a struggle so sharp that, in the midst of it, she burst out crying with strange violence; but, with that burst, her great soul conquered.

She darted out of the room, leaving Mercy astonished at her abrupt departure.

Mercy was patiently drying her eyes, when the door opened; and judge her surprise when she saw Mrs. Gaunt glide into the room with her little boy asleep in her arms, and an expression upon her face more sublime

than anything Mercy Vint had ever yet seen on earth. She kissed the babe softly, and, becoming infantile as well as angelic by this contact, sat herself down in a moment on the floor with him, and held out her hand to Mercy. "There," said she, "come sit beside us, and see how I hate him; no more than you do — sweet innocent."

They looked him all over, discussed his every feature learnedly, kissed his limbs and extremities after the manner of their sex, and comprehending at last that to have been both of them wronged by one man was a bond of sympathy, not hate, the two wives of Griffith Gaunt laid his child across their two laps, and wept over him together.

Mercy Vint took herself to task. "I am but a selfish woman," said she, "to talk or think of anything but that I came here for." She then proceeded to show Mrs. Gaunt by what means she proposed to secure her acquittal, without getting Griffith Gaunt into trouble.

Mrs. Gaunt listened with keen and grateful attention, until she came to that part; then she interrupted her eagerly.

"Don't spare him for me. In your place I'd trounce the villain finely."

"Ay," said Mercy, "and then forgive him. But I am different. I shall never forgive him, but I am a poor hand at punishing and revenging. I always was. My name is Mercy, you know. To tell the truth, I *was* to have been called Prudence, after my good aunt, but she said, nay; she had lived to hear Greed, and Selfishness, and a heap of faults, named Prudence; 'call the child something that means what it does mean, and not after me,' quoth she. So with me hearing 'Mercy, Mercy,' called out after me so many years, I do think the quality hath somehow got under my skin, for I can't abide to see folk smart, let alone to strike the blow. What, shall

I take the place of God, and punish the evil-doers, because 'tis me they wrong? Nay, dame, I will never punish him, though he hath wronged me cruelly. All I shall do is to think very ill of him, and shun him, and tear his memory out of my heart. You look at me; do you think I cannot? You don't know me. I am very resolute when I see clear. Of course I loved him, loved him dearly. He was like a husband to me, and a kind one. But the moment I knew how basely he had deceived us both, my heart began to turn against the man, and now 'tis ice to him. Heaven knows what I am made of; for, believe me, I'd liever ten times be beside you than beside him. My heart it lay like a lump of lead till I heard your story, and found I could do you a good turn, — you that he had wronged, as well as me. I read your beautiful eyes; but nay, fear me not; I'm not the woman to pine for the fruit that is my neighbor's. All I ask for on earth is a few kind words and looks from you. You are gentle, and I am simple; but we are both one flesh and blood, and your lovely wet eyes do prove it this moment. Dame Gaunt — Kate — I ne'er was ten miles from home afore, and I am come all this weary way to serve thee. Oh, give me the one thing that can do me good in this world, the one thing I pine for — a little of *your* love."

The words were scarce out of her lips when Mrs. Gaunt caught her impetuously round the neck with both hands, and laid her on that erring but noble heart of hers, and kissed her eagerly.

They kissed one another again and again, and wept over one another.

And now Mrs. Gaunt, who did nothing by halves, could not make enough of Mercy Vint. She ordered supper and ate with her, to make her eat. Mrs. Menteith offered Mercy a bed; but Mrs. Gaunt said she must lie with her, she and her child.

"What," said she, "think you I'll let you out of my sight? Alas, who knows when you and I shall ever be together again?"

"I know," said Mercy, very gravely. "In this world — never."

They slept in one bed, and held each other by the hand all night, and talked to one another, and in the morning knew each the other's story, and each the other's mind and character, better than their oldest acquaintances knew either the one or the other.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The trial began again: and the court was crowded to suffocation. All eyes were bent on the prisoner. She rose, calm and quiet, and begged leave to say a few words to the court.

Mr. Whitworth objected to that. She had concluded her address yesterday, and called a witness.

Prisoner. But I have not examined a witness yet.

The Judge. You come somewhat out of time, madam; but, if you will be brief, we will hear you.

Prisoner. I thank you, my lord. It was only to withdraw an error. The cry for help that was heard by the side of Hernshaw Mere, I said yesterday that cry was uttered by Thomas Leicester. Well, I find I was mistaken; the cry for help was uttered by my husband, by that Griffith Gaunt I am accused of assassinating.

This extraordinary admission caused a great sensation in court. The judge looked grave and sad; and Sergeant Wiltshire, who came into court just then, whispered his junior, "She has put the rope round her own neck. The jury would never have believed our witness."

Prisoner. I will only add that a person came into the town last night, who knows a great deal more about this mysterious business than I do. I purpose, therefore, to alter the plan of my defence; and, to save your time, my lord, who have dealt so courteously with me, I shall call but a single witness.

Ere the astonishment caused by this sudden collapse of the defence was in any degree abated, she called "Mercy Vint."

There was the usual stir and struggle; and then the calm self-possessed face and figure of a comely young woman confronted the court. She was sworn; and examined by the prisoner after this fashion:

"Where do you live?"

"At the 'Packhorse,' near Allerton, in Lancashire."

Prisoner. Do you know Mr. Griffith Gaunt?

Mercy. Madam, I do.

Prisoner. Was he at your place in October last?

Mercy. Yes, madam, on the thirteenth of October. On that day he left for Cumberland.

Prisoner. On foot, or on horseback?

Mercy. On horseback.

Prisoner. With boots on, or shoes?

Mercy. He had a pair of new boots on.

Prisoner. Do you know Thomas Leicester?

Mercy. A peddler called at our house on the eleventh of October, and he said his name was Thomas Leicester.

Prisoner. How was he shod?

Mercy. In hobnailed shoes.

Prisoner. Which way went he on leaving you?

Mercy. Madam, he went northwards; I know no more for certain.

Prisoner. When did you see Mr. Gaunt last?

Mercy. Four days ago.

The Judge. What is that? you saw him alive four days ago?

Mercy. Ay, my lord; the last Wednesday that ever was.

At this the people burst out into a loud agitated murmur, and their heads went to and fro all the time. In vain the crier cried and threatened. The noise rose and surged, and took its course. It went down gradually, as amazement gave way to curiosity; and then there was a remarkable silence; and then the silvery voice of the

prisoner, and the mellow tones of the witness, appeared to penetrate the very walls of the building, each syllable of those two beautiful speakers was heard so distinctly.

Prisoner. Be so good as to tell the court what passed on Wednesday last between Griffith Gaunt and you relative to this charge of murder.

Mercy. I let him know one George Neville had come from Cumberland in search of him, and had told me you lay in Carlisle jail charged with his murder. I did urge him to ride at once to Carlisle, and show himself; but he refused. He made light of the matter. Then I told him, not so; the circumstances looked ugly, and your life was in peril. Then he said, nay, 'twas in no peril, for, if you were to be found guilty, then he would show himself on the instant. Then I told him he was not worthy the name of a man; and if he would not go, I would. "Go you, by all means," said he, "and I'll give you a writing that will clear her. Jack Houseman will be there, that knows my hand; and so does the sheriff, and half the grand jury at the least."

Prisoner. Have you that writing?

Mercy. To be sure I have. Here 'tis.

Prisoner. Be pleased to read it.

The Judge. Stay a minute. Shall you prove it to be his handwriting?

Prisoner. Ay, my lord, by as many as you please.

The Judge. Then let that stand over for the present. Let me see it.

It was handed up to him; and he showed it to the sheriff, who said he thought it was Griffith Gaunt's writing.

The paper was then read out to the jury. It ran as follows: —

Know all men, that I, Griffith Gaunt, Esq., of Bolton Hall and Hernshaw Castle, in the county of Cumberland, am alive and well; and the matter, which has so puzzled the good folk

in Cumberland, befell as follows: — I left Hernshaw Castle in the dead of night upon the fifteenth of October. Why, is no man's business but mine. I found the stable locked; so I left my horse, and went on foot. I crossed Hernshaw Mere by the bridge, and had got about a hundred yards, as I suppose, on the way, when I heard some one fall with a great splash into the mere, and soon cry dolefully for help. I, that am no swimmer, ran instantly to the north side to a clump of trees, where a boat used always to be kept. But the boat was not there. Then I cried lustily for help, and, as no one came, I fired my pistol and cried murder! For I had heard men will come sooner to that cry than to any other. But in truth I was almost out of my wits, that a fellow-creature should perish miserably so near me. Whilst I ran wildly to and fro, some came out of the castle bearing torches. By this time I was at the bridge; but saw no signs of the drowning man; yet the night was clear. Then I knew that his fate was sealed; and for reasons of my own not choosing to be seen by those who were coming to his aid, I hastened from the place. My happiness being gone, and my conscience smiting me sore, and not knowing whither to turn, I took to drink, and fell into bad ways, and lived like a brute and not a man, for six weeks or more; so that I never knew of the good fortune that had fallen on me when least I deserved it; I mean by old Mr. Gaunt of Coggleswade making of me his heir. But one day at Kendal I saw Mercy Vint's advertisement; and I went to her, and learned that my wife lay in Carlisle jail for my supposed murder. But I say that she is innocent, and nowise to blame in this matter; for I deserved every hard word she ever gave me; and as for killing, she is a spirited woman with her tongue, but hath not the heart to kill a fly. She is what she always was, the pearl of womankind; a virtuous, innocent, and noble lady. I have lost the treasure of her love, by my fault, not hers; but, at least, I have a right to defend her life and honor. Whoever molests her after this, out of pretended regard for me, is a liar, and a fool, and no friend of mine, but my enemy, and I his — to the death.

GRIFFITH GAUNT.

It was a day of surprises. This tribute from the murdered man to his assassin was one of them. People looked in one another's faces open-eyed.

The prisoner looked in the judge's, and acted on what she saw there. "That is my defence," said she, quietly; and sat down.

If a show of hands had been called at that moment, she would have been acquitted by acclamation.

But Mr. Whitworth was a zealous young barrister, burning for distinction. He stuck to his case, and cross-examined Mercy Vint with severity; indeed with asperity.

Whitworth. What are you to receive for this evidence?

Mercy. Anan.

Whitworth. Oh, you know what I mean. Are you not to be paid for telling us this romance?

Mercy. Nay, sir, I ask naught for telling of the truth.

Whitworth. You were in the prisoner's company, yesterday?

Mercy. Yes, sir, I did visit her in the jail last night.

Whitworth. And there concerted this ingenious defence.

Mercy. Well, sir, for that matter, I told her that her man was alive, and I did offer to be her witness.

Whitworth. For naught.

Mercy. For no money or reward, if 'tis that you mean. Why, 'tis a joy beyond money to clear an innocent body, and save her life; and that satisfaction is mine this day.

Whitworth (sarcastically). These are very fine sentiments for a person in your condition. Confess that Mrs. Gaunt primed you with all that.

Mercy. Nay, sir, I left home in that mind; else I had not come at all. Bethink you; 'tis a long journey for one in my way of life; and this dear child on my arm all the way.

Mrs. Gaunt sat boiling with indignation. But Mercy's good temper and meekness parried the attack that time. Mr. Whitworth changed his line.

Whitworth. You ask the jury to believe that Griffith Gaunt, Esq., a gentleman, and a man of spirit and honor, is alive, yet skulks, and sends you hither, when by showing his face in this court he could clear his wife without a single word spoken?

Mercy. Yes, sir, I do hope to be believed; for I speak the naked truth. But, with due respect to you, Mr. Gaunt did not send me hither against my will. I could not bide in Lancashire and let an innocent woman be murdered in Cumberland.

Whitworth. Murdered, quotha. That is a good jest. I'd have you to know we punish murders here, not do them.

Mercy. I am glad to hear that, sir, on the lady's account.

Whitworth. Come, come. You pretend you discovered this Griffith Gaunt alive, by means of an advertisement. If so, produce the advertisement.

Mercy Vint colored, and cast a swift uneasy glance at Mrs. Gaunt.

Rapid as it was, the keen eye of the counsel caught it.

"Nay, do not look to the culprit for orders," said he. "Produce it, or confess the truth. Come, you never advertised for him."

"Sir, I did advertise for him."

"Then produce the advertisement."

"Sir, I will not," said Mercy, calmly.

"Then I shall move the court to commit you."

"For what offence, if you please?"

"For perjury, and contempt of court."

"I am guiltless of either, God knows. But I will not show the advertisement."

The Judge. This is very extraordinary. Perhaps you have it not about you.

Mercy. My lord, the truth is, I have it in my bosom. But, if I show it, it will not make this matter one whit clearer, and 'twill open the wounds of two poor women. 'Tis not for myself. But, oh, my lord, look at her; hath she not gone through grief enow?

The appeal was made with a quiet touching earnestness that affected every hearer. But the judge had a duty to perform. "Witness," said he, "you mean well; but indeed you do the prisoner an injury by withholding this paper. Be good enough to produce it at once."

Prisoner (with a deep sigh). Obey my lord.

Mercy (with a deep sigh). There, sir, may the Lord forgive you the useless mischief you are doing!

Whitworth. I am doing my duty, young woman. And yours is to tell the whole truth, and not a part only.

Mercy (acquiescing). That is true, sir.

Whitworth. Why, what is this? 'Tis not Mr. Gaunt you advertise for in these papers. 'Tis Thomas Leicester.

The Judge. What is that? I don't understand.

Whitworth. Nor I neither.

The Judge. Let me see the papers. 'Tis Thomas Leicester, sure enough.

Whitworth. And you mean to swear that Griffith Gaunt answered an advertisement inviting Thomas Leicester?

Mercy. I do. Thomas Leicester was the name he went by in our part.

Whitworth. What, what? You are jesting.

Mercy. Is this a place or a time for jesting? I say he called himself Thomas Leicester.

Here the business was interrupted again by a multitudinous murmur of excited voices. Everybody was

whispering astonishment to his neighbor. And the whisper of a great crowd has the effect of a loud murmur.

Whitworth. Oh, he called himself Thomas Leicester, did he? Then what makes you say he is Griffith Gaunt?

Mercy. Well, sir, the peddler, whose real name was Thomas Leicester, came to our house one day, and saw his picture, and knew it; and said something to a neighbor that raised my suspicions. When *he* came home, I took this shirt out of a drawer; 'twas the shirt he wore when he first came to us. 'Tis marked "G. G." (The shirt was examined.) Said I, "For God's sake speak the truth: what does G. G. stand for?" Then he told me his real name was Griffith Gaunt, and he had a wife in Cumberland. "Go back to her," said I, "and ask her to forgive you." Then he rode north, and I never saw him again till last Wednesday.

Whitworth (satirically). You seem to have been mighty intimate with this Thomas Leicester, whom you now call Griffith Gaunt. May I ask what was, or is, the nature of your connection with him?

Mercy was silent.

Whitworth. I must press for a reply, that we may know what value to attach to your most extraordinary evidence. Were you his wife — or his mistress?

Mercy. Indeed I hardly know; but not his mistress, or I should not be here.

Whitworth. You don't know whether you were married to the man or not?

Mercy. I do not say so. But —

She hesitated, and cast a piteous look at Mrs. Gaunt, who sat boiling with indignation.

At this look, the prisoner, who had long contained herself with difficulty, rose, with scarlet cheeks and

flashing eyes, in defence of her witness, and flung her prudence to the wind.

"Fie, sir," she cried. "The woman you insult is as pure as your own mother or mine. She deserves the pity, the respect, the veneration of all good men. Know, my lord, that my miserable husband deceived and married her under the false name he had taken; she has the marriage certificate in her bosom. Pray make her show it whether she will or not. My lord, this Mercy Vint is more an angel than a woman. I am her rival after a manner; yet out of the goodness and greatness of her noble heart, she came all that way to save me from an unjust death. And is such a woman to be insulted? I blush for the hired advocate who cannot see his superior in an incorruptible witness, a creature all truth, piety, purity, unselfishness, and goodness. Yes, sir, you began by insinuating that she was as venal as yourself; for you are one that can be bought by the first comer; and now you would cast a slur on her chastity. For shame! for shame! This is one of those rare women that adorn our whole sex, and embellish human nature: and, so long as you have the privilege of exchanging words with her, I shall stand here on the watch, to see that you treat her with due respect: ay, sir, with reverence; for I have measured you both, and she is as much your superior as she is mine."

This amazing burst was delivered with such prodigious fire and rapidity, that nobody was self-possessed enough to stop it in time. It was like a furious gust of words sweeping over the court.

Mr. Whitworth, pale with anger, merely said, "Madam, the good taste of these remarks I leave the court to decide upon. But you cannot be allowed to give evidence in your own defence."

"No, but in hers I will," said Mrs. Gaunt; "no power shall hinder me."

The Judge (coldly). Had you not better go on cross-examining the witness ?

Whitworth. Let me see your marriage certificate, if you have one.

It was handed to him.

"Well, now how do you know that this Thomas Leicester was Griffith Gaunt ? "

The Judge. Why, she has told you he confessed it to her.

Mercy. Yes, my lord; and, besides, he wrote me two letters signed Thomas Leicester. Here they are, and I desire they may be compared with the paper he wrote last Wednesday, and signed Griffith Gaunt. And more than that, whilst we lived together as man and wife, one Drummond, a travelling painter, took our portraits, his and mine. I have brought his with me. Let his friends and neighbors look on this portrait, and say whose likeness it is. What I say and swear is, that on Wednesday last I saw and spoke with that Thomas Leicester, or Griffith Gaunt, whose likeness I now show you.

With that she lifted the portrait up, and showed it to all the court.

Instantly there was a roar of recognition.

It was one of those hard daubs that are nevertheless so monstrously like the originals.

The Judge (to Mr. Whitworth). Young gentleman, we are all greatly obliged to you. You have made the prisoner's case. There was but one weak point in it; I mean the prolonged absence of Griffith Gaunt. You have now accounted for that. You have forced a very truthful witness to depose that this Gaunt is himself a criminal, and is hiding from fear of the law. The case for the Crown is a mere tissue of conjectures, on which no jury could safely convict, even if there was no defence at all. Under other circumstances I might decline to receive

evidence at second hand that Griffith Gaunt is alive; but here such evidence is sufficient, for it lies on the Crown to prove the man dead; but you have only proved that he was alive on the fifteenth of October, and that, since then, *somebody* is dead with shoes on. This somebody appears on the balance of proof to be Thomas Leicester, the peddler; and he has never been heard of since, and Griffith Gaunt has. Then I say you cannot carry the case farther. You have not a leg to stand on. What say you, brother Wiltshire?

Wiltshire. My lord, I think there is no case against the prisoner, and am thankful to your lordship for relieving me of a very unpleasant task.

The question of guilty or not guilty was then put as a matter of form to the jury, who instantly brought the prisoner in not guilty.

The Judge. Catherine Gaunt, you leave this court without a stain, and with our sincere respect and sympathy. I much regret the fear and pain you have been put to: you have been terribly punished for a hasty word. Profit now by this bitter lesson; and may Heaven enable you to add a well-governed spirit to your many virtues and graces.

He half rose from his seat, and bowed courteously to her. She courtesied reverently, and retired.

Then he said a few words to Mercy Vint.

"Young woman, I have no words to praise you as you deserve. You have shown us the beauty of the female character, and, let me add, the beauty of the Christian religion. You have come a long way to clear the innocent. I hope you will not stop there; but also punish the guilty person, on whom we have wasted so much pity."

"Me, my lord," said Mercy; "I would not harm a hair of his head for as many guineas as there be hairs in mine."

"Child," said my lord, "thou art too good for this world: but go thy ways; and God bless thee."

Thus abruptly ended a trial that, at first, had looked so formidable for the accused.

The judge now retired for some refreshment, and while he was gone, Sir George Neville dashed up to the Town Hall, four in hand, and rushed in by the magistrate's door, with a peddler's pack, which he had discovered in the mere, a few yards from the spot where the mutilated body was found.

He learned the prisoner was already acquitted. He left the pack with the sheriff, and begged him to show it to the judge; and went in search of Mrs. Gaunt.

He found her in the jailer's house. She and Mercy Vint were seated hand in hand. He started at first sight of the latter. There was a universal shaking of hands, and glistening of eyes. And, when this was over, Mrs. Gaunt turned to him, and said piteously, "She will go back to Lancashire to-morrow; nothing I can say will turn her."

"No, dame," said Mercy quietly, "Cumberland is no place for me. My work is done here. Our paths in this world do lie apart. George Neville, persuade her to go home at once, and not trouble about me."

"Indeed, madam," said Sir George, "she speaks wisely; she always does. My carriage is at the door, and the people waiting by thousands in the street to welcome your deliverance."

Mrs. Gaunt drew herself up with fiery and bitter disdain.

"Are they so?" said she grimly. "Then I'll balk them. I'll steal away in the dead of night. No, miserable populace, that howls and hisses with the strong against the weak, you shall have no part in my triumph; 'tis sacred to my friends. You honored me with your

hootings; you shall not disgrace me with your acclamations. Here I stay till Mercy Vint, my guardian angel, leaves me forever."

She then requested Sir George to order his horses back to the inn, and the coachman was to hold himself in readiness to start when the whole town should be asleep.

Meantime a courier was despatched to Hernshaw Castle, to prepare for Mrs. Gaunt's reception.

Mrs. Menteith made a bed up for Mercy Vint, and, at midnight, when the coast was clear, came the parting.

It was a sad one.

Even Mercy, who had great self-command, could not then restrain her tears.

To apply the sweet and touching words of Scripture, "They sorrowed most of all for this, that they should see each other's face no more."

Sir George accompanied Mrs. Gaunt to Hernshaw.

She drew back into her corner of her carriage, and was very silent and *distraite*.

After one or two attempts at conversation, he judged it the wisest and even most polite to respect her mood.

At last she burst out, "I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it!"

"Why, what is amiss?" inquired Sir George.

"What is amiss? Why, 'tis all amiss. 'Tis so heartless, so ungrateful, to let that poor angel go home to Lancashire all alone, now she has served my turn. Sir George, do not think I undervalue your company, but if you *would* but take her home instead of taking me! Poor thing, she is brave; but, when the excitement of her good action is over, and she goes back the weary road all alone, what desolation it will be! My heart bleeds for her. I know I am an unconscionable woman, to ask such a thing; but then you are a true chevalier;

you always were; and you saw her merit directly; oh, do pray leave me to slip unnoticed into Hernshaw Castle, and do you accompany my benefactress to her humble home. Will you, dear Sir George? 'Twould be such a load off my heart!"

To this appeal, uttered with trembling lip and moist eyes, Sir George replied in character. He declined to desert Mrs. Gaunt until he had seen her safe home; but that done, he would ride back to Carlisle, and escort Mercy home.

Mrs. Gaunt sighed, and said she was abusing his friendship, and should kill him with fatigue, and he was a good creature. "If anything could make me easy, this would," said she: "you know how to talk to a woman, and comfort her. I wish I was a man: I'd cure her of Griffith before we reached the 'Packhorse.' And, now I think of it, you are a very happy man to travel eighty miles with an angel, a dove-eyed angel."

"I am a happy man to have an opportunity of complying with your desires, madam," was the demure reply. "Tis not often you do me the honor to lay your orders on me."

After this, nothing of any moment passed until they reached Hernshaw Castle; and then, as they drove up to the door, and saw the hall blazing with lights, Mrs. Gaunt laid her hand softly on Sir George, and whispered, "You were right. I thank you for not leaving me."

The servants were all in the hall, to receive their mistress; and amongst them were those who had given honest but unfavorable testimony at the trial, being called by the Crown. These had consulted together, and, after many pros and cons, had decided that they had better not follow their natural impulse, and hide from her face, since that might be a fresh offence. Accord-

ingly, these witnesses, dressed in their best, stood with the others in the hall, and made their obeisances, quaking inwardly.

Mrs. Gaunt entered the hall leaning on Sir George's arm. She scarcely bestowed a look on the late witnesses for the Crown, but made them one sweeping courtesy in return, and passed on; only Sir George felt her taper fingers just nip his arm.

She made him partake of some supper, and then this *chevalier des dames* rode home, snatched a few hours' sleep, put on the yeoman's suit in which he had first visited the "Packhorse," and arriving at Carlisle, engaged the whole inside of the coach; for his orders were to console, and he did not see his way clear to do that with two or three strangers listening to every word.

CHAPTER XLV.

A GREAT change was observable in Mrs. Gaunt after this fiery and chastening ordeal. In a short time she had been taught many lessons. She had learned that the law will not allow even a woman to say anything and everything with impunity. She had been in a court of justice, and seen how gravely, soberly, and fairly an accusation is sifted there; and, if false, annihilated; which, elsewhere, it never is. Member of a sex that could never have invented a court of justice, she had found something to revere and bless in that other sex, to which her erring husband belonged. Finally, she had encountered, in Mercy Vint, a woman whom she recognized at once as her moral superior. The contact of that pure and well-governed spirit told wonderfully upon her; she began to watch her tongue, and to bridle her high spirit. She became slower to give offence, and slower to take it. She took herself to task, and made some little excuses even for Griffith. She was resolved to retire from the world altogether; but, meantime, she bowed her head to the lessons of adversity. Her features, always lovely, but somewhat too haughty, were now softened and embellished beyond description, by a mingled expression of grief, humility, and resignation.

She never mentioned her husband; but it is not to be supposed she never thought of him. She waited the course of events in dignified and patient silence.

As for Griffith Gaunt, he was in the hands of two lawyers, Atkins and Houseman. He waited on the first, and made a friend of him. "I am at your service," said

he; "but not if I am to be indicted for bigamy, and burned in the hand."

"These fears are idle," said Atkins. "Mercy Vint declared in open court she will not proceed against you."

"Ay, but there's my wife."

"She will keep quiet; I have Houseman's word for it."

"Ay, but there's the attorney-general."

"Oh, he will not move, unless he is driven. We must use a little influence. Mr. Houseman is of my mind, and he has the ear of the county."

To be brief, it was represented in high quarters that to indict Mr. Gaunt would only open Mrs. Gaunt's wounds afresh, and do no good; and so Houseman found means to muzzle the attorney-general.

Just three weeks after the trial, Griffith Gaunt, Esq., reappeared publicly. The place of his reappearance was Coggleswade. He came and set about finishing his new mansion with feverish rapidity. He engaged an army of carpenters and painters, and spent thousands of pounds on the decorating and furnishing of the mansion, and laying out the grounds.

This was duly reported to Mrs. Gaunt, who said — not a word.

But at last one day came a letter to Mrs. Gaunt, in Griffith's well-known handwriting.

With all her acquired self-possession, her hand trembled as she broke open the seal.

It contained but these words:

MADAM, — I do not ask you to forgive me; for, if you had done what I have, I could never forgive you. But, for the sake of Rose, and to stop their tongues, I do hope you will do me the honor to live under this my roof. I dare not face Hernshaw Castle. Your own apartments here are now ready for

you. The place is large. Upon my honor I will not trouble you; but show myself always, as now,

Your penitent and very humble servant,

GRIFFITH GAUNT.

The messenger was to wait for her reply.

This letter disturbed Mrs. Gaunt's sorrowful tranquillity at once. She was much agitated, and so undecided, that she sent the messenger away, and told him to call next day.

Then she sent off to Father Francis to beg his advice.

But her courier returned, late at night, to say Father Francis was away from home.

Then she took Rose, and said to her, "My darling, papa wants us to go to his new house, and leave dear old Hernshaw; I know not what to say about that. What do *you* say?"

"Tell him to come to us," said Rose, dictatorially. "Only" (lowering her little voice very suddenly), "if he is naughty and won't, why then we had better go to him. For he amuses me."

"As you please," said Mrs. Gaunt; and sent her husband this reply:

SIR, — Rose and I are agreed to defer to your judgment and obey your wishes. Be pleased to let me know what day you will require us; and I must trouble you to send a carriage.

I am, sir, your faithful wife, and humble servant,

CATHERINE GAUNT.

At the appointed day, a carriage and four came wheeling up to the door. The vehicle was gorgeously emblazoned, and the servants in rich liveries; all which finery glittering in the sun, and the glossy coats of the horses, did mightily please Mistress Rose. She stood on the stone steps, and clapped her hands with delight.

Her mother just sighed, and said, "Ay, 'tis in pomp and show we must seek our happiness now."

She leaned back in the carriage, and closed her eyes yet not so close but now and then a tear would steal out, as she thought of the past.

They drove up under an avenue to a noble mansion, and landed at the foot of some marble steps, low and narrow, but of vast breadth.

As they mounted these, a hall door, through which the carriage could have passed, was flung open, and discovered the servants all drawn up to do honor to their mistress.

She entered the hall, leading Rose by the hand; the servants bowed and courtesied down to the ground.

She received this homage with dignified courtesy, and her eye stole round to see if the master of the house was coming to receive her.

The library door was opened hastily, and out came to meet her — Father Francis.

"Welcome, madam, a thousand times welcome to your new home," said he, in a stentorian voice, with a double infusion of geniality. "I claim the honor of showing you your part of the house, though 'tis all yours for that matter." And he led the way.

Now this cheerful stentorian voice was just a little shaky for once, and his eyes were moist.

Mrs. Gaunt noticed, but said nothing before the people. She smiled graciously, and accompanied him.

He took her to her apartments. They consisted of a *salle-à-manger*, three delightful bedrooms, a boudoir, and a magnificent drawing-room, fifty feet long, with two fireplaces, and a bay-window thirty feet wide, filled with the choicest flowers.

An exclamation of delight escaped Mrs. Gaunt. Then she said, "One would think I was a queen." Then she sighed; "Ah," said she, "'tis a fine thing to be rich."

Then, despondently, "Tell him I think it very beautiful."

"Nay, madam, I hope you will tell him so yourself."

Mrs. Gaunt made no reply to that; she added: "And it was kind of him to have you here the first day: I do not feel so lonely as I should without you."

She took Griffith at his word, and lived with Rose in her own apartments.

For some time Griffith used to slip away whenever he saw her coming.

One day she caught him at it, and beckoned him.

He came to her.

"You need not run away from me," said she: "I did not come into your house to quarrel with you. Let us be *friends*." And she gave him her hand sweetly enough, but oh, so coldly.

"I hope for nothing more," said Griffith. "If you ever have a wish, give me the pleasure of gratifying it: that is all."

"I wish to retire to a convent," said she quietly.

"And desert your daughter?"

"I would leave her behind, to remind you of days gone by."

By degrees they saw a little more of one another: they even dined together, now and then. But it brought them no nearer. There was no anger, with its loving reaction. They were friendly enough, but an icy barrier stood between them.

One person set himself quietly to sap this barrier. Father Francis was often at the castle, and played the peacemaker very adroitly.

The line he took might be called the innocent Jesuitical. He saw that it would be useless to exhort these two persons to ignore the terrible things that happened, and to make it up as if it was only a squabble. What he did

was to repeat to the husband every gracious word the wife let fall, and *vice versa*, and to suppress all either said that might tend to estrange them.

In short, he acted the part of Mr. Harmony in the play, and acted it to perfection.

Gutta cavat lapidem.

Though no perceptible effect followed his efforts, yet there is no doubt that he got rid of some of the bitterness. But the coldness remained.

One day he was sent for all in a hurry by Griffith.

He found him looking gloomy and agitated.

The cause came out directly. Griffith had observed, at last, what all the females in the house had seen two months ago, that Mrs. Gaunt was in the family way.

He now communicated this to Father Francis with a voice of agony, and looks to match.

"All the better, my son," said the genial priest; "'twill be another tie beween you. I hope it will be a fine boy to inherit your estates." Then, observing a certain hideous expression distorting Griffith's face, he fixed his eyes full on him, and said sternly, "Are you not cured yet of that madness of yours?"

"No, no, no," said Griffith deprecatingly; "but why did she not tell me?"

"You had better ask her."

"Not I. She will remind me I am nothing to her now. And, though 'tis so, yet I would not hear it from her lips."

In spite of this wise resolution, the torture he was in drove him to remonstrate with her on her silence.

She blushed high, and excused herself as follows: —

"I should have told you as soon as I knew it myself, but you were not with me. I was all by myself — in Carlisle jail."

This reply, uttered with hypocritical meekness, went

through Griffith like a knife. He turned white, and gasped for breath, but said nothing. He left her with a deep groan, and never ventured to mention the matter again.

All he did in that direction was to redouble his attentions and solicitude for her health.

The relation between these two was now more anomalous than ever.

Even Father Francis, who had seen strange things in families, used to watch Mrs. Gaunt rise from table and walk heavily to the door, and her husband dart to it and open it obsequiously, and receive only a very formal reverence in return, and wonder how all this was to end.

However, under this icy surface, a change was gradually going on; and one afternoon, to his great surprise, Mrs. Gaunt's maid came to ask Griffith if he would come to Mrs. Gaunt's apartment.

He found her seated in her bay-window, among her flowers. She seemed another woman all of a sudden, and smiled on him her exquisite smile of days gone by.

"Come, sit beside me," said she, "in this beautiful window that you have given me."

"Sit beside you, Kate," said Griffith; "nay, let me kneel at your knees; that is my place."

"As you will," said she softly, and continued in the same tone, "Now listen to me: you and I are two fools; we have been very happy together in days gone by; and we should both of us like to try again, but we neither of us know how to begin. You are afraid to tell me you love me, and I am ashamed to own to you or anybody else that I love you, in spite of it all; I do, though."

"You love me! a wretch like me, Kate? 'Tis impossible. I cannot be so happy!"

"Child," said Mrs. Gaunt, "love is not reason; love is not common sense. 'Tis a passion; like your jealousy,

poor fool! I love you, as a mother loves her child, all the more for all you have made me suffer. I might not say as much if I thought we should be long together. But something tells me I shall die this time: I never felt so before. I want you to bury me at Hernshaw. After all, I spent more happy years there than most wives ever know. I see you are very sorry for what you have done. How could I die and leave thee in doubt of my forgiveness and my love? Kiss me, poor jealous fool! for I do forgive thee, and love thee with all my sorrowful heart." And even with these words she bowed herself and sank quietly into his arms, and he kissed her and cried bitterly over her: bitterly. But she was comparatively calm. For she said to herself, "The end is at hand."

Griffith, instead of pooh-poohing his wife's forebodings, set himself to baffle them.

He used his wealth freely, and, besides the county doctor, had two very eminent practitioners from London, one of whom was a gray-headed man, the other singularly young for the fame he had obtained. But then he was a genuine enthusiast in his art.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Griffith, white as a ghost, and unable to shake off the forebodings Catherine had communicated to him, walked incessantly up and down the room; and at his earnest request, one or other of the four doctors in attendance was constantly coming to him with information.

The case proceeded favorably, and to Griffith's surprise and joy, a healthy boy was born about two o'clock in the morning. The mother was reported rather feverish, but nothing to cause alarm.

Griffith threw himself on two chairs, and fell fast asleep.

Towards morning he found himself shaken, and there was Ashley, the young doctor, standing beside him with a very grave face. Griffith started up, and cried, "What is wrong, in God's name?"

"I am sorry to say there has been a sudden hemorrhage, and the patient is much exhausted."

"She is dying, she is dying!" cried Griffith, in anguish.

"Not dying. But she will infallibly sink unless some unusual circumstance occur to sustain vitality."

Griffith laid hold of him. "Oh, sir, take my whole fortune, but save her! save her! save her!"

"Mr. Gaunt," said the young doctor, "be calm, or you will make matters worse. There is one chance to save her, but my professional brethren are prejudiced against it. However, they have consented, at my earnest request, to refer my proposal to you. She is sinking for want of blood. If you consent to my opening a vein and trans-

fusing healthy blood from a living subject into hers, I will undertake the operation. You had better come and see her; you will be more able to judge."

"Let me lean on you," said Griffith. And the strong wrestler went tottering up the stairs. There they showed him poor Kate, white as the bed-clothes, breathing hard, and with a pulse that hardly moved.

Griffith looked at her horror-struck.

"Death has got hold of my darling," he screamed. "Snatch her away! for God's sake, snatch her from him!"

The young doctor whipped off his coat, and bared his arm.

"There," he cried, "Mr. Gaunt consents. Now, Corrie, be quick with the lancet, and hold this tube as I tell you; warm it first in that water."

Here came an interruption. Griffith Gaunt griped the young doctor's arm, and with an agonized and ugly expression of countenance cried out, "What! *your* blood? What right have you to lose blood for her?"

"The right of a man who loves his art better than his blood," cried Ashley, with enthusiasm.

Griffith tore off his coat and waistcoat, and bared his arm to the elbow. "Take every drop I have. No man's blood shall enter her veins but mine." And the creature seemed to swell to double his size, as with flushed cheek and sparkling eyes he held out a bare arm corded like a blacksmith's, and white as a duchess's.

The young doctor eyed the magnificent limb a moment with rapture; then fixed his apparatus and performed an operation which then, as now, was impossible in theory; only he did it. He sent some of Griffith Gaunt's bright red blood smoking hot into Kate Gaunt's veins.

This done, he watched his patient closely, and administered stimulants from time to time.

She hung between life and death for hours. But at noon next day she spoke, and seeing Griffith sitting beside her, pale with anxiety and loss of blood, she said, "My dear, do not thou fret. I died last night. I knew I should. But they gave me another life, and now I shall live to a hundred."

They showed her the little boy, and at sight of him the whole woman made up her mind to live.

And live she did. And, what is very remarkable, her convalescence was more rapid than on any former occasion.

It was from a talkative nurse she first learned that Griffith had given his blood for her. She said nothing at the time, but lay with an angelic, happy smile, thinking of it.

The first time she saw him after that, she laid her hand on his arm, and looking heaven itself into his eyes, she said, "My life is very dear to me now. 'Tis a present from thee."

She wanted a good excuse for loving him as frankly as before, and now he had given her one. She used to throw it in his teeth in the prettiest way. Whenever she confessed a fault, she was sure to turn slyly round and say, "But what could one expect of me? I have his blood in my veins."

But once she told Father Francis, quite seriously, that she had never been quite the same woman since she lived by Griffith's blood; she was turned jealous; and, moreover, it had given him a fascinating power over her, and she could tell blindfold when he was in the room. Which last fact indeed she once proved by actual experiment. But all this I leave to such as study the occult sciences in this profound age of ours.

Starting with this advantage, Time, the great curer, gradually healed a wound that looked incurable.

Mrs. Gaunt became a better wife than she had ever been before. She studied her husband, and found he was not hard to please. She made his home bright and genial, and so he never went abroad for the sunshine he could have at home.

And he studied her. He added a chapel to the house, and easily persuaded Francis to become the chaplain. Thus they had a peacemaker and a friend in the house, and a man severe in morals, but candid in religion, and an inexhaustible companion to them and their children.

And so, after that terrible storm, this pair pursued the even tenor of a peaceful united life, till the olive-branches rising around them, and the happy years gliding on, almost obliterated that one dark passage, and made it seem a mere fantastical, incredible dream.

Mercy Vint and her child went home in the coach. It was empty at starting, and, as Mrs. Gaunt had foretold, a great sense of desolation fell upon her.

She leaned back, and the patient tears coursed steadily down her comely cheeks.

At the first stage a passenger got down from the outside and entered the coach.

"What, George Neville!" said Mercy.

"The same," said he.

She expressed her surprise that he should be going her way.

"'Tis strange," said he; "but to me most agreeable."

"And to me too, for that matter," said she.

Sir George observed her eyes were red, and, to divert her mind and keep up her spirits, launched into a flow of small-talk.

In the midst of it, Mercy leaned back in the coach and began to cry bitterly. So much for that mode of consolation.

Upon this he faced the situation and begged her not to grieve. He praised the good action she had done, and told her how everybody admired her for it, especially himself.

At that she gave him her hand in silence, and turned away her pretty head. He carried her hand respectfully to his lips, and his manly heart began to yearn over this suffering virtue, so grave, so dignified, so meek. He was no longer a young man; he began to talk to her like a friend. This tone, and the soft sympathetic voice in which a gentleman speaks to a woman in trouble, unlocked her heart, and for the first time in her life she was led to talk about herself.

She opened her heart to him. She told him she was not the woman to pine for any man. Her youth, her health, and love of occupation, would carry her through. What she mourned was the loss of esteem, and the blot upon her child. At that she drew the baby with inexpressible tenderness, and yet with a half-defiant air, closer to her bosom.

Sir George assured her she would lose the esteem of none but fools. "As for me," said he, "I always respected you, but now I revere you. You are a martyr, and an angel."

"George," said Mercy, gravely, "be you my friend, not my enemy."

"Why, madam," said he, "sure you can't think me such a wretch."

"I mean, our flatterers are our enemies."

Sir George took the hint, given, as it was, very gravely and decidedly, and henceforth showed her his respect by his acts; he paid her as much attention as if she had been a princess. He handed her out and handed her in; and coaxed her to eat here and to drink there; and at the inn where the passengers slept for the night, he showed

his long purse, and secured her superior comforts. Console her he could not, but he broke the sense of utter desolation and loneliness with which she started from Carlisle. She told him so in the inn, and descanted on the goodness of God, who had sent her a friend in that bitter hour.

"You have been very kind to me, George," said she. "Now Heaven bless you for it, and give you many happy days, and well spent."

This, from one who never said a word she did not mean, sank deep into Sir George's heart, and he went to sleep thinking of her, and asking himself, was there nothing he could do for her?

Next morning Sir George handed Mercy and her babe into the coach; and the villain tried an experiment to see what value she set on him. He did not get in, so Mercy thought she had seen the last of him.

"Farewell, good, kind George," said she; "alas, there's nought but meeting and parting in this weary world."

The tears stood in her sweet eyes, and she thanked him, not with words only, but with the soft pressure of her womanly hand.

He slipped up behind the coach, and was ashamed of himself, and his heart warmed to her more and more.

As soon as the coach stopped, my lord opened the door for Mercy to alight. Her eyes were very red, he saw that. She started, and beamed with surprise and pleasure.

"Why, I thought I had lost you for good," said she. "Whither are you going? to Lancaster?"

"Not quite so far. I am going to the 'Packhorse.'"

Mercy opened her eyes, and blushed high. Sir George saw, and, to divert her suspicions, told her merrily to beware of making objections. "I am only a sort of servant in the matter. 'Twas Mrs. Gaunt ordered me."

"I might have guessed it," said Mercy. "Bless her; she knew I should be lonely."

"She was not easy till she had got rid of me, I assure you," said Sir George. "So let us make the best on't, for she is a lady that likes to have her own way."

"She is a noble creature. George, I shall never regret anything I have done for *her*. And she will not be ungrateful. Oh, the sting of ingratitude! I have felt that. Have you?"

"No," said Sir George; "I have escaped that, by never doing any good actions."

"I doubt you are telling me a lie," said Mercy Vint.

She now looked upon Sir George as Mrs. Gaunt's representative, and prattled freely to him. Only now and then her trouble came over her, and then she took a quiet cry without ceremony.

As for Sir George, he sat and studied, and wondered at her.

Never in his life had he met such a woman as this, who was as candid with him as if he had been a woman. She seemed to have a window in her bosom, through which he looked, and saw the pure and lovely soul within.

In the afternoon they reached a little town, whence a cart conveyed them to the "Packhorse."

Here Mercy Vint disappeared, and busied herself with Sir George's comforts.

He sat by himself in the parlor, and missed his gentle companion.

In the morning, Mercy thought of course he would go.

But instead of that, he stayed, and followed her about, and began to court her downright.

But the warmer he got, the cooler she. And at last she said, mighty dryly, "This is a very dull place for the likes of you."

"'Tis the sweetest place in England," said he; "at least to me; for it contains — the woman I love."

Mercy drew back, and colored rosy red. "I hope not," said she.

"I loved you the first day I saw you, and heard your voice. And now I love you ten times more. Let me dry thy tears forever, sweet Mercy. Be my wife."

"You are mad," said Mercy. "What, would you wed a woman in my condition? I am more your friend than to take you at your word. And what do you think I am made of, to go from one man to another, like that?"

"Take your time, sweetheart; only give me your hand."

"George," said Mercy, very gravely, "I am beholden to you; but my duty it lies another way. There is a young man in these parts (Sir George groaned) that was my follower for two years and better. I wronged him for one I never name now. I must marry that poor lad, and make him happy, or else live and die as I am."

Sir George turned pale. "One word: do you love him?"

"I have a regard for him."

"Do you love him?"

"Hardly. But I wronged him, and I owe him amends. I shall pay my debt."

Sir George bowed, and retired sick at heart, and deeply mortified. Mercy looked after him and sighed.

Next day, as he walked disconsolate up and down, she came to him and gave him her hand. "You were a good friend to me that bitter day," said she. "Now let me be yours. Do not bide here; 'twill but vex you."

"I am going, madam," said Sir George, stiffly. "I but wait to see the man you prefer to me. If he is not too unworthy of you, I'll go, and trouble you no more. I have learned his name."

Mercy blushed; for she knew Paul Carrick would bear no comparison with George Neville.

The next day Sir George took leave to observe that this Paul Carrick did not seem to appreciate her preference so highly as he ought. "I understand he has never been here."

Mercy colored, but made no reply; and Sir George was sorry he had taunted her. He followed her about, and showed her great attention, but not a word of love.

There were fine trout streams in the neighborhood, and he busied himself fishing, and in the evening read aloud to Mercy, and waited to see Paul Carrick.

Paul never came; and, from a word Mercy let drop, he saw that she was mortified. Then, being no tyro in love, he told her he had business in Lancaster, and must leave her for a few days. But he would return, and by that time perhaps Paul Carrick would be visible.

Now his main object was to try the effect of correspondence.

Every day he sent her a long love-letter from Lancaster.

Paul Carrick, who, in absenting himself for a time, had acted upon his sister's advice rather than his own natural impulse, learned that Mercy received a letter every day. This was a thing unheard of in that parish.

So then Paul defied his sister's advice, and presented himself to Mercy; when the following dialogue took place: —

"Welcome home, Mercy."

"Thank you, Paul."

"Well, I'm single still, lass."

"So I hear."

"I'm come to say, let bygones be bygones."

"So be it," said Mercy, dryly.

"You have tried a gentleman; now try a farrier."

"I have; and he did not stand the test."

"Anan."

"Why did you not come near me for ten days?"

Paul blushed up to the eyes. "Well," said he, "I'll tell you the truth. 'Twas our Jess advised me to leave you quiet just at first."

"Ay, ay. I was to be humbled, and made to smart for my fault; and then I should be thankful to take you. My lad, if ever you should be really in love, take a friend's advice; listen to your own heart, and not to shallow advisers. You have mortified a poor sorrowful creature who was going to make a sacrifice for you, and you have lost her forever."

"What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that ye are to think no more of Mercy Vint."

"Then it is true, ye jade; ye've gotten a fresh lover already."

"Say no more than you know. If you were the only man on earth I would not wed you, Paul Carrick."

Paul Carrick retired home, and blew up his sister; and told her that she had "gotten him the sack again."

The next day Sir George came back from Lancaster, and Mercy lowered her lashes for once at sight of him.

"Well," said he, "has this Carrick shown a sense of your goodness?"

"He has come, — and gone."

She then, with her usual frankness, told him what had passed. "And," said she, with a smile, "you are partly to blame; for how could I help comparing your behavior to me with his? *You* came to my side when I was in trouble, and showed me respect when I expected scorn from all the world. A friend in need is a friend indeed."

"Reward me, reward me!" said Sir George, gayly, "you know the way."

"Nay, but I am too much *your* friend," said Mercy.

"Be less my friend, then, and more my darling."

He pressed her, he urged her, he stuck to her, he pestered her.

She snubbed, and evaded, and parried, and liked him all the better for his pestering her.

At last, one day, she said, "If Mrs. Gaunt thinks it will be for your happiness, I *will* — in six months' time; but you shall not marry in haste to repent at leisure. And I must have time to learn two things — whether you can be constant to a simple woman like me, and whether I can love again as tenderly as you deserve to be loved."

All his endeavors to shake this determination were vain. Mercy Vint had a terrible deal of quiet resolution.

He retired to Cumberland, and in a long letter, asked Mrs. Gaunt's advice. She replied characteristically. She began very soberly to say that she should be the last to advise a marriage between persons of different conditions in life. "But then," said she, "this Mercy is altogether an exception. If a flower grows on a dunghill, 'tis still a flower, and not a part of the dunghill. She has the essence of gentility, and indeed her *manners* are better bred than most of our ladies. There is too much affectation abroad, and that is your true vulgarity. Tack 'my lady' on to Mercy Vint, and that dignified and quiet simplicity of hers will carry her with credit through every court in Europe. Then think of her virtues — (here the writer began to lose her temper) — where can you hope to find such another? she is a moral genius, and acts well, no matter under what temptation, as surely as Claude and Raphael paint well. Why, sir, what do you seek in a wife? Wealth? title? family? But you possess them already; you want something in addition that will make you happy. Well, take that angelic goodness into your house, and you will find, by your own absolute

happiness, how ill your neighbors have wived. For my part, I see but one objection; the child. Well, if you are man enough to take the mother, I am woman enough to take the babe. In one word, he who has the sense to fall in love with such an angel, and has not the sense to marry it, if he can, is a fool."

"Postscript — My poor friend, to what end think you I sent you down in the coach with her?"

Sir George, thus advised, acted as he would have done had the advice been just the opposite.

He sent Mercy a love-letter by every post, and he often received one in return; only his were passionate, and hers gentle and affectionate.

But one day came a letter that was a mere cry of distress:

"George, my child is dying. What shall I do?"

He mounted his horse, and rode to her.

He came too late. The little boy had died suddenly of croup, and was to be buried next morning.

The poor mother received him up-stairs, and her grief was terrible. She clung sobbing to him, and could not be comforted. Yet she felt his coming. But a mother's anguish overpowered all.

Crushed by this fearful blow, her strength gave way for a time, and she clung to George Neville, and told him she had nothing left but him, and one day implored him not to die and leave her.

Sir George said all he could think of to comfort her; and at the end of a fortnight persuaded her to leave the "Packhorse" and England, as his wife.

She had little power to resist now; and indeed little inclination.

They were married by special license, and spent a twelvemonth abroad.

At the end of that time they returned to Neville's

Court, and Mercy took her place there with the same dignified simplicity that had adorned her in a humbler station.

Sir George had given her no lessons; but she had observed closely, for his sake; and being already well educated, and very quick and docile, she seldom made him blush except with pride.

They were the happiest pair in Cumberland. Her merciful nature now found a larger field for its exercise, and, backed by her husband's purse, she became the Lady Bountiful of the parish and the county.

The day after she reached Neville's Court came an exquisite letter to her from Mrs. Gaunt. She sent an affectionate reply.

But the Gaunts and the Nevilles did not meet in society.

Sir George Neville and Mrs. Gaunt, being both singularly brave and haughty people, rather despised this arrangement.

But it seems that, one day, when they were all four in the Town Hall, folk whispered and looked; and both Griffith Gaunt and Lady Neville surprised these glances, and determined, by one impulse, it should never happen again. Hence it was quite understood that the Nevilles and the Gaunts were not to be asked to the same party or ball.

The wives, however, corresponded, and Lady Neville easily induced Mrs. Gaunt to co-operate with her in her benevolent acts, especially in saving young women who had been betrayed, from sinking deeper.

Living a good many miles apart, Lady Neville could send her stray sheep to service near Mrs. Gaunt, and *vice versa;* and so, merciful, but discriminating, they saved many a poor girl who had been weak, not wicked.

So, then, though they could not eat nor dance together

in earthly mansions, they could do good together; and, methinks, in the eternal world, where years of social intercourse will prove less than cobwebs, these their joint acts of mercy will be links of a big, strong chain, to bind their souls in everlasting amity

It was a remarkable circumstance, that the one child of Lady Neville's unhappy marriage died, but her nine children by Sir George all grew to goodly men and women. That branch of the Nevilles became remarkable for high principle and good sense; and this they owe to Mercy Vint, and to Sir George's courage in marrying her. This Mercy was granddaughter to one of Cromwell's Ironsides, and brought her rare personal merit into their house, and also the best blood of the old Puritans, than which there is no blood in England more rich in male courage female chastity, and all the virtues.

PEG WOFFINGTON.

PEG WOFFINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

About the middle of the last century, at eight o'clock in the evening, in a large but poor apartment, a man was slumbering on a rough couch. His rusty and worn suit of black was of a piece with his uncarpeted room, the deal table of home manufacture, and its slim unsnuffed candle.

The man was Triplet, scene painter, actor, and writer of sanguinary plays, in which what ought to be, viz.: truth, plot, situation, and dialogue, were not; and what ought not to be, were: *scilicet*, small talk, big talk, fops, ruffians, and ghosts.

His three mediocrities fell so short of one talent, that he was sometimes *impransus*.

He slumbered, but uneasily; the dramatic author was uppermost, and his "Demon of the Hayloft" hung upon the thread of popular favor.

On his uneasy slumber entered from the theatre, Mrs. Triplet.

She was a lady who in one respect fell behind her husband; she lacked his variety in ill-doing, but she recovered herself by doing her one thing a shade worse than he did any of his three. She was what is called in grim sport, an actress; she had just cast her mite of

discredit on royalty by playing the Queen, and had trundled home the moment the breath was out of her royal body. She came in rotatory with fatigue, and fell, gristle, into a chair; she wrenched from her brow a diadem and eyed it with contempt, took from her pocket a sausage, and contemplated it with respect and affection, placed it in a frying-pan on the fire, and entered her bedroom, meaning to don a loose wrapper, and dethrone herself into comfort.

But the poor woman was shot walking by Morpheus, and subsided altogether; for dramatic performances, amusing and exciting to youth seated in the pit, convey a certain weariness to those bright beings who sparkle on the stage for bread and cheese.

Royalty disposed of, still left its trail of events. The sausage began to "spit." The sound was hardly out of its body, when poor Triplet writhed like a worm on a hook. "Spitter, spittest," went the sausage. Triplet groaned, and at last his inarticulate murmurs became words: "That's right, pit, now that is so reasonable to condemn a poor fellow's play before you have heard it out." Then, with a change of tone, "Tom," muttered he, "they are losing their respect for spectres; if they do, hunger will make a ghost of me." Next, he fancied the clown or somebody had got into his ghost's costume.

"Dear," said the poor dreamer, "the clown makes a very pretty spectre, with his ghastly white face, and his blood boltered cheeks and nose. I never saw the fun of a clown before: no, no, no! it is not the clown, it is worse, much worse; oh, dear; ugh!" and Triplet rolled off the couch like Richard the Third. He sat a moment on the floor, with a finger in each eye; and then finding he was neither daubing, ranting, nor deluging earth with "acts," he accused himself of indolence, and sat down to write a small tale of blood and bombast; he took his

seat at the deal table with some alacrity, for he had recently made a discovery.

How to write well, *rien que cela.*

"First, think in as homely a way as you can; next, shove your pen under the thought, and lift it by polysyllables to the true level of fiction" (when done, find a publisher — if you can). "This," said Triplet, "insures common sense to your ideas, which does pretty well for a basis," said Triplet apologetically, "and elegance to the dress they wear." Triplet then casting his eyes round, in search of such actual circumstances as could be incorporated on this plan with fiction, began to work thus:

TRIPLET'S FACTS.	TRIPLET'S FICTION.
A farthing dip is on the table.	A solitary candle cast its pale gleams around.
It wants snuffing.	Its elongated wick betrayed an owner steeped in oblivion.
He jumped up, and snuffed it with his fingers. Burned his fingers, and swore a little.	He rose languidly, and trimmed it with an instrument that he had by his side for that purpose, and muttered a silent ejaculation.

Before, however, the mole Triplet could undermine literature and level it with the dust, various interruptions and divisions broke in upon his design, and, *sic nos servavit* Apollo. As he wrote the last sentence, a loud rap came to his door. A servant in livery brought him a note from Mr. Vane, dated Covent Garden. Triplet's eyes sparkled, he bustled, wormed himself into a less rusty coat, and started off to the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

In those days, the artists of the pen and the brush ferreted patrons, instead of aiming to be indispensable to the public, the only patron worth a single gesture of the quill.

Mr. Vane had conversed with Triplet; that is, let Triplet talk to him in a coffee-house, and Triplet, the most sanguine of unfortunate men, had already built a series of expectations upon that interview, when this note arrived. Leaving him on his road from Lambeth to Covent Garden, we must introduce more important personages.

Mr. Vane was a wealthy gentleman from Shropshire, whom business had called to London four months ago, and now pleasure detained. Business still occupied the letters he sent now and then to his native county; but it had ceased to occupy the writer. He was a man of learning and taste, as times went; and his love of the arts had taken him some time before our tale to the theatres, then the resort of all who pretended to taste; and it was thus he had become fascinated by Mrs. Woffington, a lady of great beauty, and a comedian high in favor with the town.

The first night he saw her was an epoch in the history of this gentleman's mind. He had learning and refinement, and he had not great practical experience, and such men are most open to impression from the stage. He saw a being, all grace and bright nature, move like a goddess among the stiff puppets of the scene; her glee and her pathos were equally catching, she held a golden key at which all the doors of the heart flew open. Her face, too, was as full of goodness as intelligence — it was like no other face; the heart bounded to meet it.

He rented a box at her theatre. He was there every night before the curtain drew up; and I am sorry to say, he at last took half a dislike to Sunday — Sunday, "which knits up the ravelled sleave of care," Sunday, "tired nature's sweet restorer," because, on Sunday, there was no Peg Woffington. At first, he regarded her as a being of another sphere, an incarnation of poetry

PEG WOFFINGTON.

and art; but by degrees his secret aspirations became bolder. She was a woman; there were men who knew her; some of them inferior to him in position, and, he flattered himself, in mind. He had even heard a tale against her character. To him her face was its confutation, and he knew how loose-tongued is calumny; but still — !

At last one day he sent her a letter, unsigned. This letter expressed his admiration of her talent in warm but respectful terms; the writer told her it had become necessary to his heart to return her in some way his thanks for the land of enchantment to which she had introduced him. Soon after this, choice flowers found their way to her dressing-room every night, and now and then verses and precious stones mingled with her roses and eglantine. And oh! how he watched the great actress's eye all the night; how he tried to discover whether she looked oftener towards his box than the corresponding box on the other side of the house.

Did she notice him, or did she not? What a point gained, if she was conscious of his nightly attendance; she would feel he was a friend, not a mere auditor. He was jealous of the pit, on whom Mrs. Woffington lavished her smiles without measure.

At last, one day he sent her a wreath of flowers, and implored her, if any word he had said to her had pleased or interested her, to wear this wreath that night. After he had done this he trembled; he had courted a decision, when, perhaps, his safety lay in patience and time. She made her *entrée;* he turned cold as she glided into sight from the prompter's side; he raised his eyes slowly and fearfully from her feet to her head; her head was bare, wreathed only by its own rich glossy honors. "Fool!" thought he, "to think she would hang frivolities upon that glorious head for me." Yet, his disappointment

told him he had really hoped it; he would not have sat out the play, but for a leaden incapacity of motion that seized him.

The curtain drew up for the fifth act, and — could he believe his eyes? — Mrs. Woffington stood upon the stage with his wreath upon her graceful head. She took away his breath. She spoke the epilogue, and, as the curtain fell, she lifted her eyes, he thought, to his box, and made him a distinct, queen-like courtesy; his heart fluttered to his mouth, and he walked home on wings and tiptoe. In short —

Mrs. Woffington, as an actress, justified a portion of this enthusiasm. She was one of the truest artists of her day; a fine lady in her hands was a lady, with the genteel affectation of a gentlewoman: not a harlot's affectation, which is simply and without exaggeration what the stage commonly gives us for a fine lady; an old woman in her hands was a thorough woman, thoroughly old, not a cackling young person of epicene gender. She played Sir Harry Wildair like a man, which is how he ought to be played (or, which is better still, not at all), so that Garrick acknowledged her as a male rival, and abandoned the part he no longer monopolized.

Now it very, very rarely happens that a woman of her age is high enough in art and knowledge to do these things. In players, vanity cripples art at every step. The young actress who is not a Woffington aims to display herself by means of her part, which is vanity; not to raise her part by sinking herself in it, which is art. It has been my misfortune to see ——, and ——, and ——, and ——, et ceteras, play the man; nature forgive them, if you can, for art never will; they never reached any idea more manly than a steady resolve to exhibit the points of a woman with greater ferocity than they could in a

gown. But consider, ladies, a man is not the meanest of the brute creation, so how can he be an unwomanly female? This sort of actress aims not to give her author's creation to the public, but to trot out the person instead of the creation, and shows sots what a calf it has — and is.

Vanity, vanity! all is vanity! Mesdames les Charlatanes.

Margaret Woffington was of another mould; she played the ladies of high comedy with grace, distinction, and delicacy. But in Sir Harry Wildair she parted with a woman's mincing foot and tongue, and played the man in a style large, spirited, and *élancé*. As Mrs. Day (committee), she painted wrinkles on her lovely face so honestly that she was taken for threescore, and she carried out the design with voice and person, and did a vulgar old woman to the life. She disfigured her own beauties to show the beauty of her art: in a word, she was an artist! It does not follow she was the greatest artist that ever breathed; far from it. Mr. Vane was carried to this notion by passion and ignorance.

On the evening of our tale he was at his post, patiently sitting out one of those sanguinary discourses our rude forefathers thought were tragic plays. *Sedet æternumque Sedebit Infelix Theseus*, because Mrs. Woffington is to speak the epilogue.

These epilogues were curiosities of the human mind; they whom, just to ourselves and *them*, we call our *forbears*, had an idea their blood and bombast were not ridiculous enough in themselves, so when the curtain had fallen on the *débris* of the *dramatis personæ*, and of common-sense, they sent on an actress to turn all the sentiment so laboriously acquired into a jest.

To insist that nothing good or beautiful shall be carried safe from a play out into the street was the

bigotry of English horse-play. Was a Lucretia the heroine of the tragedy, she was careful in the epilogue to speak like Messalina. Did a king's mistress come to hunger and repentance, she disinfected all the *petites maîtresses* in the house of the moral, by assuring them that sin is a joke, repentance a greater, and that she individually was ready for either if they would but cry, laugh, and pay. Then the audience used to laugh, and if they did not, lo! the manager, actor, and author of heroic tragedy, were exceeding sorrowful.

Whilst sitting attendance on the epilogue, Mr. Vane had nothing to distract him from the congregation but a sanguinary sermon in five heads, so his eyes roved over the pews, and presently he became aware of a familiar face watching him closely. The gentleman to whom it belonged, finding himself recognized, left his seat, and a minute later Sir Charles Pomander entered Mr. Vane's box.

This Sir Charles Pomander was a gentleman of vice: pleasure he called it. Mr. Vane had made his acquaintance two years ago in Shropshire. Sir Charles, who husbanded everything except his soul, had turned himself out to grass for a month. His object was, by roast mutton, bread with some little flour in it, air, water, temperance, chastity, and peace, to be enabled to take a deeper plunge into impurities of food and morals.

A few nights ago, unseen by Mr. Vane, he had observed him in the theatre. An ordinary man would have gone at once and shaken hands with him; but this was not an ordinary man, this was a diplomatist. First of all, he said to himself, "What is this man doing here?" Then he soon discovered this man must be in love with some actress; then it became his business to know who she was; this too soon betrayed itself. Then it became more than ever Sir Charles's business to know whether Mrs.

Woffington returned the sentiment, and here his penetration was at fault for the moment; he determined, however, to discover.

Mr. Vane then received his friend all unsuspicious how that friend had been skinning him with his eyes for some time past. After the usual compliments had passed between two gentlemen who had been hand and glove for a month, and forgotten each other's existence for two years, Sir Charles still keeping in view his design, said, —

"Let us go upon the stage." The fourth act had just concluded.

"Go upon the stage!" said Mr. Vane; "what, where she — I mean among the actors?"

"Yes; come into the green-room. There are one or two people of reputation there; I will introduce you to them, if you please."

"Go upon the stage!" why, if it had been proposed to him to go to heaven he would not have been more astonished. He was too astonished at first to realize the full beauty of the arrangement, by means of which he might be within a yard of Mrs. Woffington, might feel her dress rustle past him, might speak to her, might drink her voice fresh from her lips almost before it mingled with meaner air. Silence gives consent, and Mr. Vane, though he thought a great deal, said nothing; so Pomander rose, and they left the boxes together. He led the way to the stage door, which was opened obsequiously to him; they then passed through a dismal passage, and suddenly emerged upon that scene of enchantment, the stage: a dirty platform encumbered on all sides with piles of scenery in flats. They threaded their way through rusty velvet actors and fustian carpenters, and entered the green-room. At the door of this magic chamber Vane trembled and half wished he

could retire. They entered; his apprehension gave way to disappointment; she was not there. Collecting himself, he was presently introduced to a smart, jaunty, and to do him justice, *distingué* old beau. This was Colley Cibber, Esq., poet laureate, and retired actor and dramatist, a gentleman who is entitled to a word or two.

This Cibber was the only actor since Shakespeare's time who had both acted and written well. Pope's personal resentment misleads the reader of English poetry as to Cibber's real place among the wits of the day.

The man's talent was dramatic, not didactic, or epic, or pastoral. Pope was not so deep in the drama as in other matters, and Cibber was one of its luminaries; he wrote some of the best comedies of his day. He also succeeded where Dryden, for lack of true dramatic taste, failed. He tampered successfully with Shakespeare. Colley Cibber's version of "Richard the Third" is impudent and slightly larcenic, but it is marvellously effective. It has stood a century, and probably will stand forever; and the most admired passages, in what literary humbugs who pretend they know Shakespeare by the closet, not the stage, accept as Shakespeare's "Richard," are Cibber's.

Mr. Cibber was now in private life, a mild edition of his own Lord Foppington; he had none of the snob-fop as represented on our conventional stage; nobody ever had, and lived. He was in tolerably good taste; but he went ever gold-laced, highly-powdered, scented, and diamonded, dispensing graceful bows, praises of whoever had the good luck to be dead, and satire of all who were here to enjoy it.

Mr. Vane, to whom the drama had now become the golden branch of letters, looked with some awe on this veteran, for he had seen many Woffingtons. He fell soon upon the subject nearest his heart. He asked Mr

Cibber what he thought of Mrs. Woffington. The old gentleman thought well of the young lady's talent, especially her comedy; in tragedy, said he, she imitates Mademoiselle Dumesil, of the Théâtre Français, and confounds the stage rhetorician with the actress. The next question was not so fortunate. "Did you ever see so great and true an actress upon the whole?"

Mr. Cibber opened his eyes, a slight flush came into his wash-leather face, and he replied: "I have not only seen many equal, many superior to her, but I have seen some half-dozen who would have eaten her up and spit her out again, and not known they had done anything out of the way."

Here Pomander soothed the veteran's dudgeon by explaining in dulcet tones that his friend was not long from Shropshire, and— The critic interrupted him, and bade him not dilute the excuse.

Now, Mr. Vane had as much to say as either of them, but he had not the habit, which dramatic folks have, of carrying his whole bank in his cheek-pocket, so they quenched him for two minutes. But lovers are not silenced, he soon returned to the attack; he dwelt on the grace, the ease, the freshness, the intelligence, the universal beauty of Mrs. Woffington. Pomander sneered, to draw him out. Cibber smiled, with good-natured superiority. This nettled the young gentleman, he fired up, his handsome countenance glowed, he turned Demosthenes for her he loved. One advantage he had over both Cibber and Pomander, a fair stock of classical learning; on this he now drew.

"Other actors and actresses," said he, "are monotonous in voice, monotonous in action, but Mrs. Woffington's delivery has the compass and variety of nature, and her movements are free from the stale uniformity that distinguishes artifice from art. The others seem to me to

have but two dreams of grace, a sort of crawling on stilts is their motion, and an angular stiffness their repose." He then cited the most famous statues of antiquity, and quoted situations in plays where, by her fine dramatic instinct, Mrs. Woffington, he said, threw her person into postures similar to these, and of equal beauty; not that she strikes attitudes like the rest, but she melts from one beautiful statue into another; and if sculptors could gather from her immortal graces, painters too might take from her face the beauties that belong of right to passion and thought, and orators might revive their withered art, and learn from those golden lips the music of old Athens, that quelled tempestuous mobs, and princes drunk with victory.

Much as this was, he was going to say more, ever so much more, but he became conscious of a singular sort of grin upon every face; this grin made him turn rapidly round to look for its cause. It explained itself at once; at his very elbow was a lady, whom his heart recognized, though her back was turned to him. She was dressed in a rich silk gown, pearl white, with flowers and sprigs embroidered; her beautiful white neck and arms were bare. She was sweeping up the room with the epilogue in her hand, learning it off by heart; at the other end of the room she turned, and now she shone full upon him.

It certainly was a dazzling creature: she had a head of beautiful form, perched like a bird upon a throat massive yet shapely and smooth as a column of alabaster, a symmetrical brow, black eyes full of fire and tenderness, a delicious mouth, with a hundred varying expressions, and that marvellous faculty of giving beauty alike to love or scorn, a sneer or a smile. But she had one feature more remarkable than all, her eyebrows — the actor's feature — they were jet black, strongly marked, and in repose were arched like a rainbow; but it was their ex-

traordinary flexibility which made other faces upon the stage look sleepy beside Margaret Woffington's. In person she was considerably above the middle height, and so finely formed that one could not determine the exact character of her figure. At one time it seemed all stateliness, at another time, elegance personified, and flowing voluptuousness at another. She was Juno, Psyche, Hebe, by turns, and for aught we know at will.

It must be confessed that a sort of halo of personal grandeur surrounds a great actress. A scene is set; half a dozen nobodies are there lost in it, because they are and seem lumps of nothing. The great artist steps upon that scene, and how she fills it in a moment! Mind and majesty wait upon her in the air; her person is lost in the greatness of her personal presence; she dilates with *thought*, and a stupid giantess looks a dwarf beside her.

No wonder then that Mr. Vane felt overpowered by this torch in a closet. To vary the metaphor, it seemed to him, as she swept up and down, as if the green-room was a shell, and this glorious creature must burst it and be free. Meantime, the others saw a pretty actress studying her business; and Cibber saw a dramatic schoolgirl learning what he presumed to be a very silly set of words. Sir C. Pomander's eye had been on her the moment she entered, and he watched keenly the effect of Vane's eloquent eulogy; but apparently the actress was too deep in her epilogue for anything else. She came in, saying "Mum, mum, mum," over her task, and she went on doing so. The experienced Mr. Cibber, who had divined Vane in an instant, drew him into a corner, and complimented him on his well-timed eulogy.

"You acted that mighty well, sir," said he. "Stop my vitals! if I did not think you were in earnest, till I saw the jade had slipped in among us. It told, sir — it told."

Up fired Vane. "What do you mean, sir?" said he. "Do you suppose my admiration of that lady is feigned?"

"No need to speak so loud, sir," replied the old gentleman; "she hears you. These hussies have ears like hawks."

He then dispensed a private wink and a public bow; with which he strolled away from Mr. Vane, and walked feebly and jauntily up the room, whistling "Fair Hebe;" fixing his eye upon the past, and somewhat ostentatiously overlooking the existence of the present company.

There is no great harm in an old gentleman whistling, but there are two ways of doing it; and as this old beau did it, it seemed not unlike a small cock-a-doodle-doo of general defiance; and the denizens of the green-room, swelled now to a considerable number by the addition of all the ladies and gentlemen who had been killed in the fourth act, or whom the buttery-fingered author could not keep in hand until the fall of the curtain, felt it as such; and so they were not sorry when Mrs. Woffington, looking up from her epilogue, cast a glance upon the old beau, waited for him, and walked parallel with him on the other side the room, giving an absurdly exact imitation of his carriage and deportment. To make this more striking, she pulled out of her pocket, after a mock-search, a huge paste ring, gazed on it with a ludicrous affectation of simple wonder, stuck it, like Cibber's diamond, on her little finger, and pursing up her mouth, proceeded to whistle a quick movement,

"Which by some devilish cantrip sleight,"

played round the old beau's slow movement, without being at variance with it. As for the character of this lady-like performance, it was clear, brilliant, and loud as blacksmith.

The folk laughed; Vane was shocked: "She profanes herself by whistling," thought he. Mr. Cibber was confounded. He appeared to have no idea whence came this sparkling adagio. He looked round, placed his hands to his ears, and left off whistling. So did his musical accomplice.

"Gentlemen," said Cibber, with pathetic gravity, "the wind howls most dismally this evening! I took it for a drunken shoemaker!"

At this there was a roar of laughter, except from Mr. Vane. Peg Woffington laughed as merrily as the others, and showed a set of teeth that were really dazzling; but all in one moment, without the preliminaries an ordinary countenance requires, this laughing Venus pulled a face gloomy beyond conception. Down came her black brows straight as a line, and she cast a look of bitter reproach on all present; resuming her study, as who should say, "Are ye not ashamed to divert a poor girl from her epilogue?" And then she went on, "Mum! mum! mum!" casting off ever and anon resentful glances; and this made the fools laugh again.

The Laureate was now respectfully addressed by one of his admirers, James Quin, the Falstaff of the day, and the rival at this time of Garrick in tragic characters, though the general opinion was, that he could not long maintain a stand against the younger genius and his rising school of art.

Off the stage, James Quin was a character; his eccentricities were three, — a humorist, a glutton, and an honest man; traits that often caused astonishment and ridicule, especially the last.

"May we not hope for something from Mr. Cibber's pen after so long a silence?"

"No," was the considerate reply. "Who have ye got to play it?"

"Plenty," said Quin; "there's your humble servant, there's" —

"Humility at the head of the list," cried she of the epilogue. "Mum! mum! mum!"

Vane thought this so sharp.

"Garrick, Barry, Macklin, Kitty Clive here at my side, Mrs. Cibber, the best tragic actress I ever saw; and Woffington, who is as good a comedian as you ever saw, sir," and Quin turned as red as fire.

"Keep your temper, Jemmy," said Mrs. Woffington, with a severe accent. "Mum! mum! mum!"

"You misunderstand my question," replied Cibber, calmly; "I know your *dramatis personæ*, but where the devil are your actors?"

Here was a blow.

"The public," said Quin, in some agitation, "would snore, if we acted as they did in your time."

"How do you know that, sir?" was the supercilious rejoinder; "*you never tried!*"

Mr. Quin was silenced. Peg Woffington looked off her epilogue.

"Bad as we are," said she, coolly, "we might be worse."

Mr. Cibber turned round, slightly raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed!" said he. "Madam!" added he, with a courteous smile; "will you be kind enough to explain to me, how you could be worse?"

"If, like a crab, we could go backwards!"

At this the auditors tittered; and Mr. Cibber had recourse to his spy-glass.

This gentleman was satirical or insolent, as the case might demand, in three degrees, of which the snuff-box was the comparative, and the spy-glass the superlative. He had learned this on the stage; in annihilating Quin he had used the snuff weapon, and now he drew his spy-glass upon poor Peggy.

"Whom have we here?" said he; then he looked with his spy-glass to see; "oh, the little Irish orange girl!"

"Whose basket outweighed Colley Cibber's salary for the first twenty years of his dramatic career," was the delicate reply to the above delicate remark. It staggered him for a moment; however he affected a most puzzled air, then gradually allowed a light to steal into his features.

"Eh! ah! oh! how stupid I am; I understand; you sold something besides oranges!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Vane, and colored up to the temples, and cast a look on Cibber, as much as to say, "if you were not seventy-three!"

His ejaculation was something so different from any tone any other person there present could have uttered, that the actress's eye dwelt on him for a single moment, and in that moment he felt himself looked through and through.

"I sold the young fops a bargain, you mean," was her calm reply; "and now I am come down to the old ones. A truce, Mr. Cibber, what do you understand by an actor? Tell me; for I am foolish enough to respect your opinion on these matters!"

"An actor, young lady," said he gravely, "is an artist who has gone deep enough in art, to make dunces, critics, and greenhorns take it for nature; moreover, he really personates; which your mere *man of the stage* never does. He has learned the true art of self-multiplication. He drops Betterton, Booth, Wilkes, or, a-hem" —

"Cibber," inserted Sir Charles Pomander. Cibber bowed.

"In his dressing-room, and comes out young or old, a fop, a valet, a lover, or a hero, with voice, mien, and every gesture to match. A grain less than this may be good speaking, fine preaching, deep grunting, high rant-

ing, eloquent reciting; but I'll be hanged if it is acting!"

"Then, Colley Cibber never acted," whispered Quin to Mrs. Clive.

"Then Margaret Woffington is an actress," said M. W.; "the fine ladies take my Lady Betty for their sister. In Mrs. Day, I pass for a woman of seventy; and in Sir Harry Wildair I have been taken for a man. I would have told you that before, but I didn't know it was to my credit," said she slyly, "till Mr. Cibber laid down the law."

"Proof!" said Cibber.

"A warm letter from one lady, diamond buckles from another, and an offer of her hand and fortune from a third; *rien que cela.*"

Mr. Cibber conveyed behind her back a look of absolute incredulity; she divined it.

"I will not show you the letters," continued she, "because Sir Harry, though a rake, was a gentleman; but here are the buckles," and she fished them out of her pocket, capacious of such things. The buckles were gravely inspected, they made more than one eye water, they were undeniable.

"Well, let us see what we can do for her," said the Laureate. He tapped his box, and without a moment's hesitation produced the most execrable distich in the language.

> "Now who is like Peggy, with talent at will,
> A maid loved her Harry, *for want of a Bill?*"

"Well, child," continued he, after the applause which follows extemporary verses had subsided, "take *me* in. Play something to make me lose sight of saucy Peg Woffington, and I'll give the world five acts more before the curtain falls on Colley Cibber."

"If you could be deceived," put in Mr. Vane, somewhat timidly; "I think there is no disguise through which grace and beauty such as Mrs. Woffington's would not shine, to my eyes."

"That is to praise my person at the expense of my wit, sir, is it not?" was her reply.

This was the first word she had ever addressed to him; the tones appeared so sweet to him, that he could not find anything to reply for listening to them; and Cibber resumed:

"Meantime, I will show you a real actress; she is coming here to-night to meet me. Did ever you children hear of Ann Bracegirdle?"

"Bracegirdle!" said Mrs. Clive; "why, she has been dead this thirty years; at least, I thought so."

"Dead to the stage. There is more heat in her ashes than in your fire, Kate Clive! Ah! here comes her messenger," continued he, as an ancient man appeared with a letter in his hand. This letter Mrs. Woffington snatched and read, and at the same instant in bounced the call-boy. "Epilogue called," said this urchin, in the tone of command which these small fry of Parnassus adopt; and obedient to his high behest, Mrs. Woffington moved to the door with the Bracegirdle missive in her hand, but not before she had delivered its general contents: "The great actress will be here in a few minutes," said she, and she glided swiftly out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

People whose mind or manners possess any feature, and are not as devoid of all eccentricity as half-pounds of butter bought of metropolitan grocers, are recommended not to leave a roomful of their acquaintances until the last but one. Yes, they should always be penultimate. Perhaps Mrs. Woffington knew this; but epilogues are stubborn things, and call-boys undeniable.

"Did you ever hear a woman whistle before?"

"Never; but I saw one sit astride on an ass in Germany!"

"The saddle was not on her husband, I hope, madam?"

"No, sir; the husband walked by his kinsfolk's side, and made the best of a bad bargain, as Peggy's husband will have to."

"Wait till some one ventures on the gay Lotharia—*illi æs triplex;* that means he must have triple brass, Kitty."

"I deny that, sir; since his wife will always have enough for both."

"I have not observed the lady's brass," said Vane, trembling with passion; "but I observed her talent, and I noticed that whoever attacks her to her face, comes badly off."

"Well said, sir," answered Quin; "and I wish Kitty here would tell us why she hates Mrs. Woffington, the best-natured woman in the theatre?"

"I don't hate her, I don't trouble my head about her."

"Yes, you hate her; for you never miss a cut at her, never!"

"Do you hate a haunch of venison, Quin?" said the lady.

"No, you little unnatural monster," replied Quin.

"For all that you never miss a cut at one, so hold your tongue!"

"*Le beau raisonnement!*" said Mr. Cibber. "James Quin, don't interfere with nature's laws; let our ladies hate one another, it eases their minds; try to make them Christians and you will not convert their tempers, but spoil your own. Peggy there hates George Anne Bellamy, because she has gaudy silk dresses from Paris, by paying for them as *she* could, if not too stingy. Kitty here hates Peggy because Rich has breeched her, whereas Kitty, who now sets up for a prude, wanted to put delicacy off and small clothes on in Peg's stead, that is where the Kate and Peg shoe pinches, near the femoral artery, James.

"Shrimps have the souls of shrimps," resumed this *censor castigatorque minorum*. "Listen to me, and learn that really great actors are great in soul, and do not blubber like a great school-girl because Anne Bellamy has two yellow silk dresses from Paris, as I saw Woffington blubber in this room, and would not be comforted; nor fume like Kitty Clive, because Woffington has a pair of breeches and a little boy's rapier to go a-playing at acting with. When I was young, two giantesses fought for empire upon this very stage, where now dwarfs crack and bounce like parched peas. They played Roxana and Statira in the 'Rival Queens.' Rival queens of art themselves, they put out all their strength. In the middle of the last act the town gave judgment in favor of Statira. What did Roxana? Did she spill grease on Statira's robe, as Peg Woffington would? or stab her, as I believe Kitty here capable of doing? No! Statira was never so tenderly killed as that night: she owned this to me. Roxana bade the theatre farewell that night, and wrote

to Statira thus, — I give you word for word: 'Madam, the best judge we have, has decided in your favor. I shall never play second on a stage where I have been first so long, but I shall often be a spectator, and methinks none will appreciate your talent more than I, who have felt its weight. My wardrobe, one of the best in Europe, is of no use to me; if you will honor me by selecting a few of my dresses you will gratify me, and I shall fancy I see myself upon the stage to greater advantage than before.'"

"And what did Statira answer, sir?" said Mr. Vane, eagerly.

"She answered thus: 'Madam, the town has often been wrong, and may have been so last night, in supposing that I vied successfully with your merit; but thus much is certain, — and here, madam, I am the best judge, — that off the stage you have just conquered me. I shall wear with pride any dress you have honored, and shall feel inspired to great exertions by your presence among our spectators, unless, indeed, the sense of your magnanimity and the recollection of your talent should damp me by the dread of losing any portion of your good opinion.'"

"What a couple of stiff old things," said Mrs. Clive.

"Nay, madam, say not so," cried Vane, warmly; "surely, this was the lofty courtesy of two great minds not to be overbalanced by strife, defeat, or victory."

"What were their names, sir?"

"Statira was the great Mrs. Oldfield. Roxana you will see here to-night."

This caused a sensation.

Colley's reminiscences were interrupted by loud applause from the theatre; the present seldom gives the past a long hearing.

The old war-horse cocked his ears.

"It is Woffington speaking the epilogue," said Quin.

"Oh! she has got the length of their foot, somehow," said a small actress.

"And the breadth of their hands, too," said Pomander, waking from a nap.

"It is the depth of their hearts she has sounded," said Vane.

In those days, if a metaphor started up, the poor thing was coursed up hill and down dale, and torn limb from jacket; even in Parliament, a trope was sometimes hunted from one session into another.

"You were asking me about Mrs. Oldfield, sir," resumed Cibber, rather peevishly. "I will own to you, I lack words to convey a just idea of her double and complete supremacy. But the comedians of this day are weak-strained *farceurs* compared with her, and her tragic tone was thunder set to music.

"I saw a brigadier-general cry like a child at her Indiana; I have seen her crying with pain herself at the wing (for she was always a great sufferer), I have seen her then spring upon the stage as Lady Townley, and in a moment sorrow brightened into joy; the air seemed to fill with singing birds, that chirped the pleasure of fashion, love, and youth, in notes sparkling like diamonds and stars, and prisms. She was above criticism, out of its scope, as is the blue sky; men went not to judge her, they drank her, and gazed at her, and were warmed at her, and refreshed by her. The fops were awed into silence, and with their humbler betters thanked Heaven for her, if they thanked it for anything.

"In all the crowded theatre, care and pain and poverty were banished from the memory, whilst Oldfield's face spoke, and her tongue flashed melodies; the lawyer forgot his quillets; the polemic, the mote in his brother's eye; the old maid, her grudge against the two sexes;

the old man, his gray hairs, and his lost hours. And can it be, that all this, which should have been immortal, is quite — quite lost, is as though it had never been?" he sighed. "Can it be, that its fame is now sustained by me, who twang with my poor lute, cracked and old, these feeble praises of a broken lyre:

"'Whose wires were golden, and its heavenly air
More tunable than lark to shepherd's ear,
When wheat is green, when hawthorn buds appear?'"

He paused, and his eye looked back over many years; then, with a very different tone, he added:

"And that Jack Falstaff there must have seen her, now I think on't."

"Only once, sir," said Quin, "and I was but ten years old."

"He saw her once, and he was ten years old; yet he calls Woffington a great comedian; and my son The's wife, with her hatchet face, the greatest tragedian he ever saw! Jemmy, what an ass you must be!"

"Mrs. Cibber always makes me cry, and t'other always makes me laugh," said Quin, stoutly, "that's why."

Ce beau raisonnement met no answer but a look of sovereign contempt.

A very trifling incident saved the ladies of the British stage from further criticism. There were two candles in this room, one on each side; the call-boy had entered, and poking about for something, knocked down and broke one of these.

"Awkward imp!" cried a velvet page.

"I'll go *to the Treasury* for another, ma'am," said the boy, pertly, and vanished with the fractured wax.

I take advantage of the interruption to open Mr. Vane's mind to the reader. First he had been astonished at the freedom of sarcasm these people in-

dulged in without quarrelling; next at the non-respect of sex.

"So sex is not recognized in this community," thought he. Then the glibness and merit of some of their answers surprised and amused him. He, like me, had seldom met an imaginative repartee, except in a play or a book. "Society's" repartees were then as they are now, the good old tree in various dresses and veils: *Tu quoque, tu mentiris, vos damnemini;* but he was sick and dispirited on the whole; such very bright illusions had been dimmed in these few minutes.

She was brilliant; but her manners, if not masculine, were very daring; and yet, when she spoke to him, a stranger, how sweet and gentle her voice was! Then it was clear nothing but his ignorance could have placed her at the summit of her art.

Still he clung to his enthusiasm for her. He drew Pomander aside. "What a simplicity there is in Mrs. Woffington," said he; "the rest, male and female, are all so affected; she is so fresh and natural. They are all hot-house plants; she is a cowslip with the May dew on it."

"What you take for simplicity, is her refined art," replied Sir Charles.

"No," said Vane, "I never saw a more innocent creature."

Pomander laughed in his face; this laugh disconcerted him more than words. He spoke no more — he sat pensive. He was sorry he had come to this place, where everybody knew his goddess; yet nobody admired, nobody loved, and alas! nobody respected her.

He was roused from his reverie by a noise; the noise was caused by Cibber falling on Garrick, whom Pomander had maliciously quoted against all the tragedians of Colley Cibber's day.

"I tell you," cried the veteran, "that this Garrick has banished dignity from the stage, and given us in exchange what you and he take for fire; but it is smoke and vapor. His manner is little, like his person; it is all fuss and bustle. This is his idea of a tragic scene: A little fellow comes bustling in, goes bustling about, and runs bustling out" Here Mr. Cibber left the room, to give greater effect to his description, but presently returned in a mighty pother, saying: "'Give me another horse!' Well, where's the horse? don't you see I'm waiting for him? 'Bind up my wounds!' Look sharp now with these wounds. 'Have mercy, Heaven!' but be quick about it, for the pit can't wait for Heaven. Bustle! bustle! bustle!"

The old dog was so irresistibly funny that the whole company were obliged to laugh; but in the midst of their merriment Mrs. Woffington's voice was heard at the door.

"This way, madam."

A clear and somewhat shrill voice replied, "I know the way better than you, child," and a stately old lady appeared on the threshold.

"Bracegirdle," said Mr. Cibber.

It may well be supposed that every eye was turned on this new-comer — that Roxana for whom Mr. Cibber's story had prepared a peculiar interest. She was dressed in a rich green velvet gown with gold fringe. Cibber remembered it; she had played the "Eastern Queen" in it. Heaven forgive all concerned! It was fearfully pinched in at the waist and ribs so as to give the idea of wood inside, not woman.

Her hair and eyebrows were iron-gray, and she had lost a front tooth, or she would still have been eminently handsome. She was tall and straight as a dart, and her noble port betrayed none of the weakness of

age, only it was to be seen that her hands were a little weak, and the gold-headed crutch struck the ground rather sharply, as if it did a little limbs'-duty.

Such was the lady who marched into the middle of the room, with a "How do, Colley?" and looking over the company's heads as if she did not see them, regarded the four walls with some interest. Like a cat, she seemed to think more of places than of folk. The page obsequiously offered her a chair.

"Not so clean as it used to be," said Mrs. Bracegirdle.

Unfortunately, in making this remark, the old lady graciously patted the page's head for offering her the chair; and this action gave, with some of the ill-constituted minds that are ever on the titter, a ridiculous direction to a remark intended, I believe, for the paint and wainscots, etc.

"Nothing is as it used to be," remarked Mr. Cibber.

"All the better for everything," said Mrs. Clive.

"We were laughing at this mighty little David, first actor of this mighty little age."

Now if Mr. Cibber thought to find in the new-comer an ally of the past in its indiscriminate attack upon the present, he was much mistaken; for the old actress made onslaught on this nonsense at once.

"Ay, ay," said she, "and not the first time by many hundreds. 'Tis a disease you have. Cure yourself, Colley. Davy Garrick pleases the public; and in trifles like acting, that take nobody to heaven, to please all the world, is to be great. Some pretend to higher aims, but none have 'em. You may hide this from young fools, mayhap, but not from an old 'oman like me. He, he, he! No, no, no — not from an old 'oman like me."

She then turned round in her chair, and with that sudden, unaccountable snappishness of tone, to which the brisk old are subject, she snarled, "Gie me a pinch of snuff, some of ye, do!"

Tobacco dust was instantly at her disposal. She took it with the points of her fingers, delicately, and divested the crime of half its uncleanness and vulgarity — more an angel couldn't.

"Monstrous sensible woman, though!" whispered Quin to Clive.

"Hey, sir! what do you say, sir? for I'm a little deaf." (Not very to praise, it seems.)

"That your judgment, madam, is equal to the reputation of your talent."

The words were hardly spoken, before the old lady rose upright as a tower. She then made an oblique preliminary sweep, and came down with such a courtesy as the young had never seen.

James Quin, not to disgrace his generation, attempted a corresponding bow, for which his figure and apoplectic tendency rendered him unfit; and whilst he was transacting it, the graceful Cibber stepped gravely up, and looked down and up the process with his glass, like a naturalist inspecting some strange capriccio of an orang-outang. The gymnastics of courtesy ended without back-falls.

Cibber lowered his tone:

"You are right, Bracy. It is nonsense denying the young fellow's talent; but his Othello, now, Bracy! be just — his Othello!"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" cried she; "I thought it was Desdemona's little black boy come in without the tea-kettle."

Quin laughed uproariously.

"It made me laugh a deal more than Mr. Quin's Falstaff. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Falstaff, indeed! Snuff!" in the tone of a trumpet.

Quin secretly revoked his good opinion of this woman's sense.

"Madam," said the page timidly, "if you would but favor us with a specimen of the old style!"

"Well, child, why not? Only what makes you mumble like that? but they all do it now, I see. Bless my soul! our words used to come out like brandy-cherries; but now a sentence is like raspberry-jam, on the stage and off."

Cibber chuckled.

"And why don't you men carry yourself like Cibber here?"

"Don't press that question," said Colley dryly.

"A monstrous poor actor, though," said the merciless old woman, in a mock aside to the others; "only twenty shillings a-week for half his life;" and her shoulders went up to her ears — then she fell into a half-reverie. "Yes, we were distinct," said she; "but I must own, children, we were slow. Once, in the midst of a beautiful tirade, my lover went to sleep, and fell against me. A mighty pretty epigram, twenty lines, was writ on't by one of my gallants. Have ye as many of them as we used?"

"In that respect," said the page, "we are not behind our great-grandmothers."

"I call that pert," said Mrs. Bracegirdle, with the air of one drawing scientific distinctions. "Now, is that a boy or a lady that spoke to me last?"

"By its dress, I should say a boy," said Cibber, with his glass; "by its assurance, a lady!"

"There's one clever woman amongst ye; Peg something, plays Lothario, Lady Betty Modish, and what not."

"What! admire Woffington?" screamed Mrs. Clive; "why, she is the greatest gabbler on the stage."

"I don't care," was the reply, "there's nature about the jade. Don't contradict me," added she, with sudden fury; "a parcel of children."

"No, madam," said Clive humbly. "Mr. Cibber, will you try and prevail on Mrs. Bracegirdle to favor us with a recitation?"

Cibber handed his cane with pomp to a small actor. Bracegirdle did the same; and striking the attitudes that had passed for heroic in their day, they declaimed out of the "Rival Queens" two or three tirades, which I graciously spare the reader of this tale. Their elocution was neat and silvery; but not one bit like the way people speak in streets, palaces, fields, roads, and rooms. They had not made the grand discovery, which Mr. A. Wigan on the stage, and every man of sense off it, has made in our day and nation; namely, that the stage is a representation not of stage, but of life; and that an actor ought to speak and act in imitation of human beings, not of speaking machines that have run and creaked in a stage groove, with their eyes shut upon the world at large, upon nature, upon truth, upon man, upon woman, and upon child.

"This is slow," cried Cibber; "let us show these young people how ladies and gentlemen moved fifty years ago, *dansons.*"

A fiddler was caught, a beautiful slow minuet played, and a bit of "solemn dancing" done. Certainly, it was not gay, but it must be owned it was beautiful, it was the dance of kings, the poetry of the courtly saloon.

The retired actress, however, had frisker notions left in her: "This is slow," cried she, and bade the fiddler play, "The wind that shakes the barley," an ancient jig tune; this she danced to in a style that utterly astounded the spectators.

She showed them what fun was; her feet and her stick were all echoes to the mad strain; out went her heel behind, and returning, drove her four yards forward. She made unaccountable slants, and cut them all

over in turn if they did not jump for it. Roars of inextinguishable laughter arose, it would have made an oyster merry. Suddenly she stopped, and put her hands to her sides, and soon after she gave a vehement cry of pain.

The laughter ceased.

She gave another cry of such agony, that they were all round her in a moment.

"Oh! help me, ladies," screamed the poor woman, in tones as feminine as they were heart-rending and piteous. "Oh, my back! my loins! I suffer, gentlemen," said the poor thing faintly.

What was to be done? Mr. Vane offered his penknife to cut her laces.

"You shall cut my head off sooner," cried she, with sudden energy. "Don't pity me," said she, sadly, "I don't deserve it;" then lifting her eyes, she exclaimed, with a sad air of self-reproach: "Oh, vanity! do you never leave a woman?"

"Nay, madam!" whimpered the page, who was a good-hearted girl; "'twas your great complaisance for us, not vanity. Oh, oh, oh!" and she began to blubber to make matters better.

"No, my children," said the old lady, "'twas vanity. I wanted to show you what an old 'oman could do; and I have humiliated myself, trying to outshine younger folk. I am justly humiliated, as you see," and she began to cry a little.

"This is very painful," said Cibber.

Mrs. Bracegirdle now raised her eyes (they had set her in a chair), and looking sweetly, tenderly, and earnestly on her old companion, she said to him slowly, gently, but impressively:

"Colley, at threescore years and ten, this was ill-done of us! You and I are here now — for what? to cheer the young up the hill we mounted years ago. And, old

friend, if we detract from them we discourage them. A great sin in the old!"

"Every dog his day."

"We have had ours." Here she smiled, then laying her hand tenderly in the old man's, she added with calm solemnity: "and now we must go quietly towards our rest, and strut and fret no more the few last minutes of life's fleeting hour."

How tame my cacotype of these words compared with what they were. I am ashamed of them and myself, and the human craft of writing, which, though commoner far, is so miserably behind the godlike art of speech: *Si ipsam audivisses!*

These ink scratches, which in the imperfection of language we have called words, till the unthinking actually dream they are words, but which are the shadows of the corpses of words; these word-shadows then were living powers on her lips, and subdued, as eloquence always does, every heart within reach of the imperial tongue.

The young loved her, and the old man, softened and vanquished, and mindful of his failing life, was silent, and pressed his handkerchief to his eyes a moment; then he said:

"No, Bracy — no. Be composed, I pray you. She is right. Young people, forgive me that I love the dead too well, and the days when I was what you are now. Drat the woman," continued he, half ashamed of his emotion; "she makes us laugh, and makes us cry, just as she used."

"What does he say, young woman?" said the old lady, dryly, to Mrs. Clive.

"He says you make us laugh, and make us cry, madam; and so you do me, I'm sure."

"And that's Peg Woffington's notion of an actress!

Better it, Cibber and Bracegirdle, if you can," said the other, rising up like lightning.

She then threw Colley Cibber a note, and walked coolly and rapidly out of the room, without looking once behind her.

The rest stood transfixed, looking at one another, and at the empty chair. Then Cibber opened and read the note aloud. It was from Mrs. Bracegirdle: "Playing at tric-trac; so can't play the fool in your green-room to-night. — B."

On this, a musical ringing laugh was heard from outside the door, where the pseudo Bracegirdle was washing the gray from her hair, and the wrinkles from her face — ah! I wish I could do it as easily, — and the little bit of sticking-plaster from her front tooth.

"Why, it is the Irish jade!" roared Cibber.

"Divil a less!" rang back a rich brogue; "and it's not the furst time we put the comether upon ye, England, my jewal!"

One more mutual glance, and then the mortal cleverness of all this began to dawn on their minds; and they broke forth into clapping of hands, and gave this accomplished *mime* three rounds of applause; Mr. Vane and Sir Charles Pomander leading with "Brava, Woffington!"

Its effect on Mr. Vane may be imagined. Who but she could have done this? This was as if a painter should so paint a man as to deceive his species. This was acting, but not like the acting of the stage. He was in transports, and self-satisfaction at his own judgment mingled pleasantly with his admiration.

In this cheerful exhibition, one joined not — Mr. Cibber. His theories had received a shock (and we all love our theories). He himself had received a rap, and we don't hate ourselves.

Great is the syllogism! But there is a class of arguments less vulnerable.

If A says to B, "You can't hit me, as I prove by this syllogism" (here followeth the syllogism), and B, *pour toute réponse*, knocks A down such a whack that he rebounds into a sitting posture; and to him the man, the tree, the lamp-post, and the fire-escape, become not clearly distinguishable; this barbarous logic prevails against the logic in Barbara, and the syllogism is in the predicament of Humpty Dumpty.

In this predicament was the Poet Laureate. "The miscreant Proteus (could not) escape these chains!" So the miscreant Proteus — no bad name for an old actor — took his little cocked hat and marched; a smaller, if not a wiser man. Some disjointed words fell from him: "Mimicry is not acting," etc.; and with one bitter, mowing glance at the applauders, *circumferens acriter oculos*, he vanished in the largest pinch of snuff on record. The rest dispersed more slowly.

Mr. Vane waited eagerly, and watched the door for Mrs. Woffington; but she did not come. He then made acquaintance with good-natured Mr. Quin, who took him upon the stage, and showed him by what vulgar appliances that majestic rise of the curtain he so admired was effected. Returning to the green-room for his friend, he found him in animated conversation with Mrs. Woffington. This made Vane uneasy.

Sir Charles, up to the present moment of the evening, had been unwontedly silent, and now he was talking nineteen to the dozen, and Mrs. Woffington was listening with an appearance of interest that sent a pang to poor Vane's heart; he begged Mr. Quin to introduce him.

Mr. Quin introduced him.

The lady received his advances with polite composure. Mr. Vane stammered his admiration of her Bracegirdle; but all he could find words to say, was mere general

praise, and somewhat coldly received. Sir Charles, on the contrary, spoke more like a critic. "Had you given us the stage cackle, or any of those traditionary symptoms of old age, we should have instantly detected you," said he; "but this was art copying nature, and it may be years before such a triumph of illusion is again effected under so many adverse circumstances."

"You are very good, Sir Charles," was the reply. "You flatter me. It was one of those things which look greater than they are; nobody here knew Bracegirdle but Mr. Cibber; Mr. Cibber cannot see well without his glasses, and I got rid of one of the candles; I sent one of the imps of the theatre to knock it down. I know Mrs. Bracegirdle by heart. I drink tea with her every Sunday. I had her dress on, and I gave the old boy her words and her way of thinking; it was mere mimicry; it was nothing compared with what I once did; but, a-hem!"

"Pray tell us!"

"I am afraid I shall shock your friend. I see he is not a wicked man like you, and perhaps does not know what good-for-nothing creatures actresses are."

"He is not so ignorant as he looks," replied Sir Charles.

"That is not quite the answer I expected, Sir Charles," replied this lively lady; "but it serves me right for fishing on dry land. Well then, you must know a young gentleman courted me. I forget whether I liked him or not; but you will fancy I hated him, for I promised to marry him. You must understand, gentlemen, that I was sent into the world, not to act, which I abominate, but to chronicle small beer and teach an army of little brats their letters; so this word 'wife,' and that word 'chimney-corner,' took possession of my mind, and a vision of darning stockings for a large party, all my

own, filled my heart, and really I felt quite grateful to the little brute that was to give me all this; and he would have had such a wife as men never do have, still less deserve, but one fine day that the theatre left me time to examine his manner towards me, I instantly discovered he was deceiving me. So I had him watched, and the little brute was going to marry another woman, and break it to me by degrees afterwards, etc. You know, Sir Charles? Ah! I see you do.

"I found her out; got an introduction to her father; went down to his house three days before the marriage, with a little coal-black mustache, regimentals, and what not; made up, in short, with the art of my sex, gentlemen — and the impudence of yours.

"The first day I flirted and danced with the bride. The second I made love to her, and at night I let her know that her intended was a villain. I showed her letters of his; protestations, oaths of eternal fidelity to one Peg Woffington, 'who will die,' drawled I, 'if he betrays her.'

"And here, gentlemen, mark the justice of Heaven. I received a back-handed slap: 'Peg Woffington! an actress! Oh, the villain!' cried she; 'let him marry the little vagabond. How dare he insult me with his hand that had been offered in such a quarter?'

"So, in a fit of virtuous indignation, the little hypocrite dismissed the little brute; in other words, she had fallen in love with me.

"I have not had many happy hours, but I remember it was delicious to look out of my window, and at the same moment smell the honeysuckles and see my *perfide* dismissed under a heap of scorn and a pile of luggage he had brought down for his wedding tour.

"I scampered up to London, laughing all the way; and when I got home, if I remember right, I cried for two hours. How do you account for that?"

"I hope, madam," said Vane, gravely, "it was remorse for having trifled with that poor young lady's heart; she had never injured you."

"But, sir, the husband I robbed her of was a brute and a villain in his little way, and wicked, and good-for-nothing, etc. He would have deceived that poor little hypocrite, as he had this one," pointing to herself.

"That is not what I mean; you inspired her with an attachment, never to be forgotten. Poor lady! how many sleepless nights has she passed since then, how many times has she strained her eyes to see her angel lover returning to her? She will not forget in two years the love it cost you but two days to inspire. The powerful should be merciful. Ah! I fear you have no heart."

These words had no sooner burst from Mr. Vane than he was conscious of the strange liberty he had taken, and, indeed, the bad taste he had been guilty of; and this feeling was not lessened when he saw Mrs. Woffington color up to the temples. Her eyes, too, glittered like basilisks; but she said nothing, which was remarkable in her, whose tongue was the sword of a *maître d'armes.*

Sir Charles eyed his friend in a sly, satirical manner; he then said, laughingly, "In two months *she married a third!* don't waste your sympathy," and turned the talk into another channel; and soon after, Mrs. Woffington's maid appearing at the door, she courtesied to both gentlemen and left the theatre. Sir Charles Pomander accompanied Mr. Vane a little way.

"What becomes of her innocence?" was his first word.

"One loses sight of it in her immense talent," said the lover.

"She certainly is clever in all that bears upon her business," was the reply; "but I noticed you were a

little shocked with her indelicacy in telling us that story, and still more in having it to tell."

"Indelicacy? No!" said Vane; "the little brute deserved it. Good Heavens! to think that 'a little brute' might have married that angel, and actually broke faith to lose her; it is incredible; the crime is diluted by the absurdity."

"Have you heard him tell the story? No? Then take my word for it you have not heard the facts of the case."

"Ah! you are prejudiced against her?"

"On the contrary, I like her. But I know that with all women the present lover is an angel and the past a demon, and so on in turn. And I know that if Satan were to enter the women of the stage, with the wild idea of impairing their veracity, he would come out of their minds a greater liar than he went in, and the innocent darlings would never know their spiritual father had been at them."

Doubtful whether this sentiment and period could be improved, Sir Charles parted with his friend, leaving his sting in him like a friend; the other's reflections as he sauntered home were not strictly those of a wise, well-balanced mind, they ran in this style:

"When she said: 'Is not that to praise my person at the expense of my wit?' I ought to have said: 'Nay, madam; could your wit disguise your person, it would betray itself, so you would still shine confessed,' and instead of that I said nothing!"

He then ran over in his mind all the opportunities he had had for putting in something smart, and bitterly regretted those lost opportunities; and made the smart things, and beat the air with them. Then his cheeks tingled when he remembered that he had almost scolded her; and he concocted a very different speech, and straightway repeated it in imagination.

This is lover's pastime; I own it funny; but it is open to one objection; this single practice of sitting upon eggs no longer chickenable, carried to a habit, is capable of turning a solid intellect into a liquid one, and ruining a mind's career.

We leave Mr. Vane, therefore, with a hope that he will not do it every night; and we follow his friend to the close of our chapter.

Hey for a definition!

What is diplomacy? Is it folly in a coat that looks like sagacity? Had Sir Charles Pomander, instead of watching Mr. Vane and Mrs. Woffington, asked the former whether he admired the latter, and whether the latter responded, straightforward Vane would have told him the whole truth in a minute. Diplomacy therefore was, as it often is, a waste of time.

But diplomacy did more in this case, it *sapienter descendebat in fossam;* it fell on its nose with gymnastic dexterity, as it generally does, upon my word.

To watch Mrs. Woffington's face *vis-à-vis* Mr. Vane, Pomander introduced Vane to the green-room of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. By this Pomander learned nothing, because Mrs. Woffington had, with a wonderful appearance of openness, the closest face in Europe when she chose.

On the other hand, by introducing this country gentleman to this green-room, he gave a mighty impulse and opportunity to Vane's love; an opportunity which he forgot the timid, inexperienced Damon might otherwise never have found.

Here diplomacy was not policy, for, as my sagacious reader has perhaps divined, Sir Charles Pomander *was after her himself.*

CHAPTER III.

Yes: Sir Charles was *after* Miss Woffington. I use that phrase because it is a fine generic one, suitable to different kinds of love-making.

Mr. Vane's sentiments were an inexplicable compound; but respect, enthusiasm, and deep admiration were the uppermost.

The good Sir Charles was no enigma: he had a vacancy in his establishment — a very high situation, too, for those who like that sort of thing — the head of his table, his left hand when he drove in the park, etc. To this he proposed to promote Miss Woffington. She was handsome and witty, and he liked her. But that was not what caused him to pursue her; slow, sagacious, inevitable, as a beagle.

She was celebrated, and would confer great *éclat* on him. The scandal of possessing her was a burning temptation. Women admire celebrity in a man; but men adore it in a woman.

> "The world," says Philip, "is a famous man;
> What will not women love so taught?"

I will try to answer this question.

The women will more readily forgive disgusting physical deformity for fame's sake than we. They would embrace with more rapture a famous orang-outang, than we an illustrious chimpanzee; but when it comes to moral deformity the tables are turned.

Had the Queen pardoned Mr. Greenacre and Mrs. Manning, would the great rush have been on the hero, or

the heroine? Why, on Mrs. Macbeth! To her would the blackguards have brought honorable proposals, and the gentry liberal ones.

Greenacre would have found more female admirers than I ever shall; but the grand stream of sexual admiration would have set Mariawards. This fact is as dark as night; but it is as sure as the sun.

The next day the "friends" (most laughable of human substantives!) met in the theatre, and again visited the green-room; and this time Vane determined to do himself more justice. He was again disappointed; the actress's manner was ceremoniously polite. She was almost constantly on the stage, and in a hurry when off it; and when there was a word to be got with her, the ready, glib Sir Charles was sure to get it. Vane could not help thinking it hard that a man who professed no respect for her, should thus keep the light from him; and he could hardly conceal his satisfaction, when Pomander, at night, bade him farewell for a fortnight. Pressing business took Sir Charles into the country.

The good Sir Charles, however, could not go without leaving his sting behind as a companion to his friend. He called on Mr. Vane, and after a short preface, containing the words, "our friendship," "old kindness," "my greater experience," he gravely warned him against Mrs. Woffington.

"Not that I would say this if you could take her for what she is, and amuse yourself with her as she will with you, if she thinks it worth her while. But I see you have a heart, and she will make a football of it, and torment you beyond all you have ever conceived of human anguish."

Mr. Vane colored high, and was about to interrupt the speaker; but he continued:

"There, I am in a hurry. But ask Quin, or anybody

who knows her history, you will find she has had scores of lovers, and no one remains her friend after they part."

"Men are such villains!"

"Very likely," was the reply; "but twenty men don't ill-use one good woman: those are not the proportions. Adieu!"

This last hit frightened Mr. Vane, he began to look into himself; he could not but feel that he was a mere child in this woman's hands; and more than that, his conscience told him that if his heart should be made a football of, it would only be a just and probable punishment. For there were particular reasons why he, of all men, had no business to look twice at any woman whose name was Woffington.

That night he avoided the green-room, though he could not forego the play; but the next night he determined to stay at home altogether. Accordingly, at five o'clock, the astounded box-keeper wore a visage of dismay — there was no shilling for him! and Mr. Vane's nightly shilling had assumed the sanctity of salary in his mind.

Mr. Vane strolled disconsolate; he strolled by the Thames, he strolled up and down the Strand; and, finally, having often admired the wisdom of moths in their gradual approach to what is not good for them, he strolled into the green-room, Covent Garden, and sat down. When there he did not feel happy. Besides, she had always been cold to him, and had given no sign of desiring his acquaintance, still less of recognition.

Mr. Vane had often seen a weathercock at work, and he had heard a woman compared to it; but he had never realized the simplicity, beauty, and justice of the simile. He was therefore surprised, as well as thrilled, when Mrs. Woffington, so cool, ceremonious, and distant hitherto, walked up to him in the green-room with a face quite

wreathed in smiles, and without preliminary, thanked him for all the beautiful flowers he had sent her.

"What, Mrs. Woffington — what, you recognize me?"

"Of course, and have been foolish enough to feel quite supported by the thought, I had at least one friend in the house. But," said she, looking down, "now you must not be angry; here are some stones that have fallen somehow among the flowers; I am going to give you them back, because I value flowers, so I cannot have them mixed with anything else; but don't ask me for a flower back," added she, seeing the color mount on his face, "for I would not give one of them to you, or anybody."

Imagine the effect of this on a romantic disposition like Mr. Vane's.

He told her how glad he was that she could distinguish his features amidst the crowd of her admirers; he confessed he had been mortified when he found himself, as he thought, entirely a stranger to her.

She interrupted him.

"Do you know your friend Sir Charles Pomander? No! I am almost sure you do; well, he is a man I do not like. He is deceitful, besides he is a wicked man. There, to be plain with you, he was watching me all that night, the first time you came here, and because I saw he was watching me, I would not know who you were, nor anything about you."

"But you looked as if you had never seen me before."

"Of course I did, when I had made up my mind to," said the actress, naïvely.

"Sir Charles has left London for a fortnight, so if he is the only obstacle, I hope you will know me every night."

"Why, you sent me no flowers yesterday, or to-day."

"But I will to-morrow."

"Then I am sure I shall know your face again: good-by. Won't you see me in the last act, and tell me how ill I do it?"

"Oh, yes!" and he hurried to his box, and so the actress secured one pair of hands for her last act.

He returned to the green-room, but she did not revisit that verdant bower. The next night, after the usual compliments, she said to him, looking down with a sweet engaging air, —

"I sent a messenger into the country to know about that lady."

"What lady?" said Vane, scarcely believing his senses.

"That you were so unkind to me about."

"I, unkind to you? what a brute I must be!"

"My meaning is, you justly rebuked me, only you should not tell an actress she has no heart — that is always understood. Well, Sir Charles Pomander said she married a third in two months!"

"And did she?"

"No, it was in six weeks: that man never tells the truth; and since then she has married a fourth."

"I am glad of it!"

"So am I, since you awakened my conscience."

Delicious flattery! and of all flattery the sweetest when a sweet creature does flattery, not merely utters it.

After this Vane made no more struggles; he surrendered himself to the charming seduction, and as his advances were respectful, but ardent and incessant, he found himself at the end of a fortnight Mrs. Woffington's professed lover.

They wrote letters to each other every day. On Sunday they went to church together in the morning, and spent the afternoon in the suburbs wherever grass was and dust was not.

In the next fortnight, poor Vane thought he had

pretty well fathomed this extraordinary woman's character. Plumb the Atlantic with an eighty fathom line, sir!

"She is religious," said he, "she loves a church much better than a play-house, and she never laughs nor goes to sleep in church as I do. And she is breaking me of swearing — by degrees. She says that no fashion can justify what is profane, and that it must be vulgar as well as wicked. And she is frankness and simplicity itself."

Another thing that charmed him was her disinterestedness. She ordered him to buy her a present every day, but it was never to cost above a shilling. If an article could be found that cost exactly tenpence (a favorite sum of hers), she was particularly pleased, and these shilling presents were received with a flush of pleasure and brightening eyes: but when one day he appeared with a diamond necklace, it was taken very coldly, he was not even thanked for it, and he was made to feel, once for all, that the tenpenny ones were the best investments towards her favor.

Then he found out that she was very prudent and rather stingy; of Spartan simplicity in her diet, and a scorner of dress off the stage. To redeem this she was charitable, and her charity and her economy sometimes had a sore fight, during which she was peevish, poor little soul.

One day she made him a request.

"I can't bear you should think me worse than I am, and I don't want you to think me better than I am."

Vane trembled.

"But don't speak to others about me; promise, and I will promise to tell you my whole story whenever you are entitled to such a confidence."

"When shall I be entitled to it?"

"When I am sure you love me."

"Do you doubt that now?"

"Yes! I think you love me, but I am not sure."

"Margaret, remember I have known you much longer than you have known me."

"No!"

"Yes! Two months before we ever spoke I lived upon your face and voice."

"That is to say you looked from your box at me upon the stage, and did not I look from the stage at you?"

"Never! you always looked at the pit, and my heart used to sink."

"On the 17th of May you first came into that box. I noticed you a little, the next day I noticed you a little more; I saw you fancied you liked me, after awhile I could not have played without you."

Here was delicious flattery again, and poor Vane believed every word of it.

As for her request and her promise, she showed her wisdom in both these. As Sir Charles observed, it is a wonderful point gained if you allow a woman to tell her story her own way.

How the few facts that are allowed to remain, get moulded and twisted out of ugly forms into pretty shapes by those supple, dexterous fingers!

This present story cannot give the life of Mrs. Woffington, but only one great passage therein, as do the epic and dramatic writers; but since there was often great point in any sentences spoken on important occasions by this lady, I will just quote her defence of herself. The reader may be sure she did not play her weakest card; let us give her the benefit.

One day she and Kitty Clive were at it ding-dong; the green-room was full of actors, male and female, but there were no strangers, and the ladies were saying

things which the men of this generation only think; at last Mrs. Woffington finding herself roughly, and, as she thought, unjustly handled, turned upon the assembly and said, "What man did ever I ruin in all my life? Speak, who can!"

And there was a dead silence.

"What woman is there here at as much as three pounds per week even, that hasn't ruined two at the very least?"

Report says there was a dead silence again, until Mrs. Clive perked up, and said she had only ruined one, and that was his own fault!

Mrs. Woffington declined to attach weight to this example. "Kitty Clive is the hook without the bait," said she; and the laugh turned, as it always did, against Peggy's antagonist.

Thus much was speedily shown to Mr. Vane, that whatever were Mrs. Woffington's intentions towards him, interest had at present nothing to do with them; indeed it was made clear that even were she to surrender her liberty to him, it would only be as a princess, forging golden chains for herself with her own royal hand.

Another fortnight passed to the mutual satisfaction of the lovers. To Vane it was a dream of rapture to be near this great creature, whom thousands admired at such a distance; to watch over her, to take her to the theatre in a warm shawl, to stand at the wing and receive her as she came radiant from her dressing-room, to watch her from her rear as she stood like some power about to descend on the stage, to see her falcon-like stoop upon the said stage, and hear the burst of applause that followed, as the report does the flash; to compare this with the spiritless crawl with which common artists went on, tame from their first note to their last; to take her hand when she came off, feel how her nerves were

strung like a greyhound's after a race, and her whole frame in a high even glow, with the great Pythoness excitement of art.

And to have the same great creature leaning her head on his shoulder, and listening with a charming complacency, whilst he purred to her of love and calm delights, alternate with still greater triumphs; for he was to turn dramatic writer, for her sake was to write plays, a woman the hero, and love was to inspire him, and passion supply the want of pencraft. (You make me laugh, Mr. Vane!)

All this was heavenly.

And then with all her dash, and fire, and bravado, she was a thorough woman.

"Margaret!"

"Ernest!"

"I want to ask you a question. Did you really cry because that Miss Bellamy had dresses from Paris?"

"It does not seem very likely."

"No, but tell me; did you?"

"Who said I did?"

"Mr. Cibber."

"Old fool!"

"Yes, but did you?"

"Did I what?"

"Cry!"

"Ernest, the minx's dresses were beautiful."

"No doubt. But did you cry?"

"And mine were dirty; I don't care about gilt rags, but dirty dresses, ugh!"

"Tell me, then."

"Tell you what?"

"Did you cry or not?"

"Ah! he wants to find out whether I am a fool, and despise me."

"No, I think I should love you better: for hitherto I have seen no weakness in you, and it makes me uncomfortable."

"Be comforted! Is it not a weakness to like you?"

"You are free from that weakness, or you would gratify my curiosity."

"Be pleased to state, in plain intelligible English, what you require of me."

"I want to know, in one word, did you cry or not?"

"Promise to tease me no more then, and I'll tell you."

"I promise."

"You won't despise me?"

"Despise you! of course not."

"Well then — I don't remember!"

On another occasion, they were seated in the dusk, by the side of the canal in the park, when a little animal began to potter about on an adjacent bank.

Mrs. Woffington contemplated it with curiosity and delight.

"Oh, you pretty creature!" said she. "Now you are a rabbit: at least, I think so."

"No," said Vane, innocently; "that is a rat."

"Ah! ah! ah!" screamed Mrs. Woffington, and pinched his arm. This frightened the rat, who disappeared. She burst out laughing: "There's a fool! The thing did not frighten me, and the name did. Depend upon it, it's true what they say — that off the stage, I am the greatest fool there is. I'll never be so absurd again. Ah! ah! ah! here it is again" (scream and pinch, as before.) "Do take me from this horrid place, where monsters come from the great deep."

And she flounced away, looking daggers askant at the place the rat had vacated in equal terror.

All this was silly, but it pleases us men, and contrast

is so charming! This same fool was brimful of talent — and cunning, too, for that matter.

She played late that night, and Mr. Vane saw the same creature, who dared not stay where she was liable to a distant rat, spring upon the stage as a gay rake, and flash out her rapier, and act valor's king to the life, and seem ready to eat up everybody, King Fear included; and then, after her brilliant sally upon the public, Sir Harry Wildair came and stood beside Mr. Vane.

Her bright skin, contrasted with her powdered periwig, became dazzling. She used little rouge, but that little made her eyes two balls of black lightning. From her high instep to her polished forehead, all was symmetry. Her leg would have been a sculptor's glory; and the curve from her waist to her knee, was Hogarth's line itself.

She stood like Mercury new lighted on a heaven-kissing hill. She placed her foot upon the ground, as she might put a hand upon her lover's shoulder. We indent it with our eleven undisguised stone.

Such was Sir Harry Wildair, who stood by Mr. Vane, glittering with diamond buckles, gorgeous with rich satin breeches, velvet coat, ruffles, *pictai vestis et auri;* and as she bent her long eye-fringes down on him (he was seated), all her fiery charms gradually softened and quivered down to womanhood.

"The first time I was here," said Vane, "my admiration of you broke out to Mr. Cibber; and what do you think he said?"

"That you praised me, for me to hear you. Did you?"

"Acquit me of such meanness."

"Forgive me. It is just what I should have done, had I been courting an actress."

"I think you have not met many ingenuous spirits, dear friend?"

"Not one, my child."

This was a phrase she often applied to him now.

"The old fellow pretended to hear what I said, too; and I am sure you did not — did you?"

"Guess."

"I guess not."

"I am afraid I must plead guilty. An actress's ears are so quick to hear praise, to tell you the truth, I did catch a word or two, and, 'It told, sir — it told.'"

"You alarm me! At this rate I shall never know what you see, hear, or think, by your face."

"When you want to know anything, ask me, and I will tell you; but nobody else shall learn anything, not even you, any other way."

"Did you hear the feeble tribute of praise I was paying you, when you came in?" inquired Vane.

"No. You did not say that my voice had the compass and variety of nature, and my movements were free and beautiful, whilst the others when in motion were stilts, and coffee-pots when in repose, did you?"

"Something of the sort, I believe," cried Vane, laughing.

"I melted from one fine statue into another, I restored the Antinous to his true sex. — Goose! — Painters might learn their art from me (in my dressing-room, no doubt), and orators revive at my lips the music of Athens, that quelled mad mobs and princes drunk with victory. Silly fellow! Praise was never so sweet to me," murmured she, inclining like a goddess of love towards him; and he fastened on two velvet lips, that did not shun the sweet attack, but gently parted with a heavenly sigh; while her heaving bosom, and yielding frame, and swimming eyes, confessed her conqueror.

That morning Mr. Vane had been dispirited, and apparently self-discontented; but at night, he went home in a

state of mental intoxication. His poetic enthusiasm, his love, his vanity, were all gratified at once. And all these, singly, have conquered prudence and virtue a million times.

She had confessed to him that she was disposed to risk her happiness on him; she had begged him to submit to a short probation; and she had promised, if her confidence and esteem remained unimpaired at the close of that period — which was not to be an unhappy one — to take advantage of the summer holidays, and cross the water with him, and forget everything in the world with him, but love.

How was it that the very next morning, clouds chased one another across his face? Was it that men are happy, but while the chase is doubtful? Was it the letter from Pomander announcing his return, and sneeringly inquiring whether he was still the dupe of Peg Woffington? or was it that same mysterious disquiet which attacked him periodically, and then gave way for awhile to pleasure and her golden dreams?

The next day was to be a day of delight. He was to entertain her at his own house; and to do her honor, he had asked Mr. Cibber, Mr. Quin, and other actors, critics, etc.

Our friend Sir Charles Pomander had been guilty of two ingenuities: first, he had written three or four letters, full of respectful admiration, to Mrs. Woffington, of whom he spoke slightingly to Vane; second, he had made a disingenuous purchase.

This purchase was Pompey, Mrs. Woffington's little black slave. It is a horrid fact, but Pompey did not love his mistress; he was a little enamoured of her, as small boys are apt to be, but on the whole, a sentiment of hatred slightly predominated in his little black bosom.

It was not without excuse.

This lady was subject to two unpleasant companions, sorrow and bitterness. About twice a week she would cry for two hours; and after this class of fit she generally went abroad, and made a round of certain poor or sick *protégés* she had, and returned smiling and cheerful.

But other twice a week she might be seen to sit upon her chair, contracted into half her size, and looking daggers at the universe in general, the world in particular; and on these occasions, it must be owned, she stayed at home, and sometimes whipped Pompey.

Pompey had not the sense to reflect that he ought to have been whipped every day, or the *esprit de corps* to be consoled by observing that this sort of thing did his mistress good. What he felt was, that his mistress, who did everything well, whipped him with energy and skill; it did not take ten seconds, but still, in that brief period, Pompey found himself dusted and polished off.

The sacred principle of justice was as strong in Mrs. Woffington as in the rest of her sex, she had not one grain of it. When she was not in her tantrums, the mischievous imp was as sacred from check or remonstrance as a monkey, or a lap-dog; and several female servants left the house on his account.

But Nemesis overtook him in the way we have hinted, and it put his little black pipe out.

The lady had taken him out of great humanity; he was fed like a game-cock, and dressed like a Barbaric prince; and once, when he was ill, his mistress watched him, and nursed him, and tended him with the same white hand that plied the obnoxious whip; and when he died, she alone withheld her consent from his burial, and this gave him a chance black boys never get, and he came-to again; but still these tarnation lickings "stuck in him gizzard." So when Sir Charles's agent proposed to him certain silver coins, cheap at a little treachery,

the ebony ape grinned till he turned half ivory, and became a spy in the house of his mistress.

The reader will have gathered, that the good Sir Charles had been quietly in London some hours before he announced himself as *paulo post futurum.*

Diamond cut diamond; a diplomatic stole this march upon an actress, and took her black pawn. One for Pomander! (Gun.)

CHAPTER IV.

Triplet, the Cerberus of art, who had the first bark in this legend, and has since been out of hearing, ran from Lambeth to Covent Garden, on receipt of Mr. Vane's note. But ran he never so quick, he had built a full-sized castle in the air before he reached Bow Street.

The letter hinted at an order upon his muse for amatory verse: delightful task, cheering prospect.

Bid a man whose usual lot it is to break stones for the parish at tenpence the cubic yard; bid such an one play at marbles with stone taws for half an hour per day, and pocket one pound one. Bid a poor horse who has drawn those stones about, and browsed short grass by the wayside, bid him canter a few times round a grassy ring, and then go to his corn. In short, bid Rosinante change with Pegasus, and you do no more than Mr. Vane's letter held out to Triplet.

The amatory verse of that day was not up-hill work. There was a beaten track on a dead level, and you followed it. You told the tender creature, with a world of circumlocution, that, "without joking now," she was a leper, ditto a tigress, item marble. You next feigned a lucid interval, and to be on the point of detesting your monster, but in twenty more verses love became, as usual, stronger than reason, and you wound up your rotten yarn thus: —

You hugged a golden chain. You drew deeper into your wound a barbed shaft, like — (any wild animal will do, no one of them is such an ass, so you had an equal title to all); and on looking back you saw with horrible

complacency that you had inflicted one hundred locusts, five feet long, upon oppressed humanity.

Wont to travel over acres of canvas for a few shillings, and roods of paper on bare speculation, Triplet knew he could make a thousand a year at the above work without thinking.

He came therefore to the box-keeper with his eyes glittering.

"Mr. Vane?"

"Just gone out with a gentleman."

"I'll wait then."

Now Mr. Vane, we know, was in the green-room, and went home by the stage-door. The last thing he thought of was poor Triplet; the rich do not dream how they disappoint the poor. Triplet's castle fell as many a predecessor had. When the lights were put out, he left the theatre with a bitter sigh.

"If this gentleman knew how many sweet children I have, and what a good, patient, suffering wife, sure he would not have chosen me to make a fool of!" said the poor fellow to himself.

In Bow Street, he turned, and looked back upon the theatre. How gloomy and grand it loomed!

"Ah!" thought he, "if I could but conquer you; and why not? All history shows that nothing is unconquerable except perseverance. Hannibal conquered the Alps, and I'll conquer you," cried Triplet, firmly. "Yes, this visit is not lost; here I register a vow: I will force my way into that mountain of masonry, or perish in the attempt."

Triplet's most unpremeditated thoughts and actions often savored ridiculously of the sublime. Then and there, gazing with folded arms on this fortress of Thespis, the polytechnic man organized his first assault. The next evening he made it.

Five months previously he had sent the manager three great, large tragedies. He knew the aversion a theatrical manager has to read a manuscript play, not recommended by influential folk; an aversion which always has been carried to superstition. So he hit on the following scheme: —

He wrote Mr. Rich a letter; in this, he told Mr. Rich that he (Triplet) was aware what a quantity of trash is offered every week to a manager, how disheartening it must be to read it all, and how natural, after awhile, to read none. Therefore, he (Triplet) had provided that Mr. Rich might economize his time, and yet not remain in ignorance of the dramatic treasure that lay ready to his hand.

"The soul of a play," continued Triplet, "is the plot or fable. A gentleman of your experience can decide at once whether a plot or story is one to take the public!"

So then he drew out, in full, the three plots. He wrote these plots in verse! Heaven forgive us all, he really did. There were also two margins left; on one, which was narrow, he jotted down the *locale* per page of the most brilliant passages; on the other margin, which was as wide as the column of the plot, he made careful drawings of the personages in the principal dramatic situations; scrolls issued from their mouths, on which were written the words of fire that were flowing from each in these eruptions of the dramatic action. All was referred to pages in the manuscripts.

"By this means, sir," resumed the latter, "you will gut my fish in a jiffy; permit me to recall that expression, with apologies for my freedom. I would say, you will, in a few minutes of your valuable existence, skim the cream of Triplet."

This author's respect for the manager's time, carried him into further and unusual details.

"Breakfast," said he, "is a quiet meal. Let me respectfully suggest, that by placing one of my plots on the table, with, say the sugar-basin upon it (this, again, is a mere suggestion), and the play it appertains to on your other side; you can readily judge my work without disturbing the avocations of the day, and master a play in the twinkling of a tea-cup; forgive my facetiousness. This day month, at ten of the clock, I shall expect," said Triplet, with sudden severity, "sir, your decision!"

Then gliding back to the courtier, he formally disowned all special title to the consideration he expected from Mr. Rich's well-known courtesy; still, he begged permission to remind that gentleman, that he had six years ago painted for him a large scene, illuminated by two great poetical incidents: a red sun, of dimensions never seen out of doors in this or any country; and an ocean of sand, yellower than up to that time had been attained in art or nature; and that once, when the audience, late in the evening, had suddenly demanded a popular song from Mr. Nokes, he (Triplet) seeing the orchestra thinned by desertion, and nugatory by intoxication, had started from the pit, resuscitated with the whole contents of his snuff-box, the bass fiddle, snatched the leader's violin, and carried Mr. Nokes triumphantly through; that thunders of applause had followed, and Mr. Nokes had kindly returned thanks *for both;* but that he (Triplet) had hastily retired to evade the manager's acknowledgments, preferring to wait an opportunity like the present, when both interests could be conciliated, etc.

This letter he posted at its destination, to save time, and returned triumphant home. He had now forgiven and almost forgotten Vane; and had reflected that, after all, the drama was his proper walk.

"My dear," said he to Mrs. Triplet, "this family is on

the eve of a great triumph!" Then, inverting that order of the grandiloquent and the homely which he invented in our first chapter, he proceeded to say: "I have reared in a single day a new avenue, by which histrionic greatness, hitherto obstructed, may become accessible. Wife, I think I have done the trick at last. Lysimachus!" added he; "let a libation be poured out on so smiling an occasion, and a burnt-offering rise to propitiate the celestial powers. Run to the 'Sun,' you dog. Three pennyworth of ale, and a hap'orth o' tobacco."

Ere the month was out, I am sorry to say, the Triplets were reduced to a state of beggary. Mrs. Triplet's health had long been failing; and although her duties at her little theatre were light and occasional, the manager was obliged to discharge her, since she could not be depended upon.

The family had not enough to eat! Think of that! They were not warm at night, and they felt gnawing and faintness often by day. Think of that!

Fortune was unjust here. The man was laughable, and a goose, and had no genius either for writing, painting, or acting; but in that he resembled most writers, painters, and actors of his own day and ours. He was not beneath the average of what men call art, and it is art's antipodes — treadmill artifice.

Other fluent ninnies shared gain, and even fame, and were called "pen-men," in Triplet's day. Other ranters were quietly getting rich by noise. Other liars and humbugs were painting out o' doors in-doors, and eating mutton instead of thistles for drenched stinging-nettles, yclept trees; for block-tin clouds; for butlers' pantry seas, and garret-conceived lakes; for molten sugar-candy rivers; for airless atmosphere and sunless air; for carpet nature, and cold, dead fragments of an earth all soul and

living glory to every cultivated eye but a routine painter's. Yet the man of many such mediocrities could not keep the pot boiling. We suspect that to those who would rise in life, even strong versatility is a very doubtful good, and weak versatility ruination.

At last, the bitter, weary month was gone, and Triplet's eye brightened gloriously. He donned his best suit; and, whilst tying his cravat, lectured his family. First, he complimented them upon their deportment in adversity; hinted that moralists, not experience, had informed him prosperity was far more trying to the character. Put them all solemnly on their guard down to Lucy, *ætat.* five, that they were *morituri* and *æ*, and must be pleased to abstain from "insolent gladness" upon his return.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity," continued this cheerful monitor. "If we had not been hard-up this while, we should not come with a full relish to meat three times a week, which, unless I am an ass (and I don't see myself in that light)," said Triplet, dryly, "will, I apprehend, be, after this day, the primary condition of our future existence."

"James, take the picture with you," said Mrs. Triplet, in one of those calm, little, desponding voices that fall upon the soul so agreeably when one is a cock-a-hoop, and desires, with permission, so to remain.

"What on earth am I to take Mrs. Woffington's portrait for?"

"We have nothing in the house," said the wife, blushing.

Triplet's eye glittered like a rattlesnake's.

"The intimation is eccentric," said he. "Are you mad, Jane? Pray," continued he, veiling his wrath in scornful words, "is it requisite, heroic, or judicious, on the eve, or more correctly the morn, of affluence, to

deposit an unfinished work of art with a mercenary relation? Hang it, Jane! would you really have me pawn Mrs. Woffington to-day?"

"James," said Jane, steadily, "the manager may disappoint you; we have often been disappointed; so take the picture with you. They will give you ten shillings on it."

Triplet was of those who see things roseate, Mrs. Triplet lurid.

"Madam," said the poet, "for the first time in our conjugal career, your commands deviate so entirely from reason, that I respectfully withdraw that implicit obedience which has hitherto constituted my principal reputation. I'm hanged if I do it, Jane!"

"Dear James, to oblige me!"

"That alters the case; you confess it is unreasonable?"

"Oh, yes! it is only to oblige me."

"Enough!" said Triplet, whose tongue was often a flail that fell on friend, foe, and self, indiscriminately. "Allow it to be unreasonable, and I do it as a matter of course — to please you, Jane."

Accordingly, the good soul wrapped it in green baize; but to relieve his mind he was obliged to get behind his wife, and shrug his shoulders to Lysimachus and the eldest girl, as who should say, *voilà bien une femme votre mère à vous!*

At last he was off in high spirits. He reached Covent Garden at half-past ten, and there the poor fellow was sucked into our narrative whirlpool.

We must, however, leave him for a few minutes.

CHAPTER V.

Sir Charles Pomander was detained in the country much longer than he expected.

He was rewarded by a little adventure. As he cantered up to London with two servants and a post-boy, all riding on horses ordered in relays beforehand, he came up with an antediluvian coach, stuck fast by the roadside. Looking into the window, with the humane design of quizzing the elders who should be there, he saw a young lady of surpassing beauty. This altered the case; Sir Charles instantly drew bridle and offered his services.

The lady thanked him, and, being an innocent country lady, she opened those sluices, her eyes, and two tears gently trickled down, while she told him how eager she was to reach London, and how mortified at this delay.

The good Sir Charles was touched. He leaped his horse over a hedge, galloped to a farmhouse in sight, and returned with ropes and rustics. These and Sir Charles's horses soon drew the coach out of some stiffish clay.

The lady thanked him, and thanked him, and thanked him, with heightening color and beaming eyes, and he rode away like a hero.

Before he had gone five miles he became thoughtful and self-dissatisfied. Finally his remorse came to a head: he called to him the keenest of his servants, Hunsdon, and ordered him to ride back past the carriage, then follow and put up at the same inn, to learn who the lady was, and whither going, and, this knowledge gained,

to ride into town full speed, and tell his master all about it. Sir Charles then resumed his complacency, and cantered into London that same evening.

Arrived there, he set himself in earnest to cut out his friend with Mrs. Woffington. He had already caused his correspondence with that lady to grow warm and more tender by degrees. Keeping a copy of his last, he always knew where he was. Cupid's barometer rose by rule; and so he arrived by just gradations at an artful climax, and made her, in terms of chivalrous affection, an offer of a house, etc., three hundred a year, etc., not forgetting his heart, etc. He knew that the ladies of the stage have an ear for flattery, and an eye to the main chance.

The good Sir Charles felt sure that however she might flirt with Vane or others, she would not forego a position for any disinterested *penchant*. Still, as he was a close player, he determined to throw a little cold water on that flame. His plan, like everything truly scientific, was simple.

"I'll run her down to him, and ridicule him to her," resolved this faithful friend and lover dear.

He began with Vane. He found him just leaving his own house. After the usual compliments, some such dialogue as this took place between Telemachus and pseudo Mentor:—

"I trust you are not really in the power of this actress?"

"You are the slave of a word," replied Vane. "Would you confound black and white because both are colors? She is like that sisterhood in nothing but a name. Even on the stage they have nothing in common. They are puppets — all attitude and trick: she is all ease, grace, and nature."

"Nature!" cried Pomander. "*Laissez-moi tranquille.*

They have artifice — nature's libel. She has art — nature's counterfeit."

"Her voice is truth told by music," cried the poetical lover: "theirs are jingling instruments of falsehood."

"They are all instruments," said the satirist; "she is rather the best tuned and played."

"Her face speaks in every lineament: theirs are rouged and wrinkled masks."

"Her mask is the best made, mounted and moved; that is all."

"She is a fountain of true feeling."

"No; a pipe that conveys it without spilling or holding a drop."

"She is an angel of talent, sir."

"She's a devil of deception."

"She is a divinity to worship."

"She's a woman to fight shy of. There is not a woman in London better known," continued Sir Charles. "She is a fair actress on the boards, and a great actress off them; but I can tell you how to add a new charm to her."

"Heaven can only do that," said Vane hastily.

"Yes, you can. Make her blush. Ask her for the list of your predecessors."

Vane winced visibly. He quickened his step, as if to get rid of this gadfly.

"I spoke to Mr. Quin," said he at last, "and he who has no prejudice paid her character the highest compliment."

"You have paid it the highest it admits," was the reply. "You have let it deceive you." Sir Charles continued in a more solemn tone, "Pray be warned. Why is it every man of intellect loves an actress once in his life, and no man of sense ever did it twice?"

This last hit, coming after the carte and tierce we

have described, brought an expression of pain to Mr. Vane's face. He said abruptly, "Excuse me, I desire to be alone for half an hour."

Machiavel bowed, and, instead of taking offence, said, in a tone full of feeling, "Ah! I give you pain. But you are right: think it calmly over awhile, and you will see I advise you well."

He then made for the theatre, and the weakish personage he had been playing upon walked down to the river, almost ran, in fact. He wanted to be out of sight.

He got behind some houses, and then his face seemed literally to break loose from confinement, so anxious, sad, fearful and bitter were the expressions that coursed each other over that handsome countenance.

What is the meaning of these hot and cold fits? It is not Sir Charles who has the power to shake Mr. Vane so without some help from within. *There is something wrong about this man!*

CHAPTER VI.

MACHIAVEL entered the green-room, intending to wait for Mrs. Woffington and carry out the second part of his plan.

He knew that weak minds cannot make head against ridicule, and with this pick-axe he proposed to clear the way before he came to grave, sensible, business love with the lady. Machiavel was a man of talent. If he has been a silent personage hitherto, it is merely because it was not his cue to talk, but listen; otherwise, he was rather a master of the art of speech. He could be insinuating, eloquent, sensible, or satirical, at will. This personage sat in the green-room. In one hand was his diamond snuff-box, in the other a richly laced handkerchief; his clouded cane reposed by his side.

There was an air of success about this personage. The gentle reader, however conceited a dog, could not see how he was to defeat Sir Charles, who was tall, stout, handsome, rich, witty, self-sufficient, cool, majestic, courageous, and in whom were united the advantages of a hard head, a tough stomach, and no heart at all.

This great creature sat expecting Mrs. Woffington, like Olympian Jove awaiting Juno. But he was mortal after all; for suddenly the serenity of that adamantine countenance was disturbed: his eye dilated, his grace and dignity were shaken. He huddled his handkerchief into one pocket, his snuff-box into another, and forgot his cane. He ran to the door in unaffected terror.

Where are all his fine airs before a real danger? Love, intrigue, diplomacy, were all driven from his

mind; for he beheld that approaching, which is the greatest peril and disaster known to social man. He saw a bore coming into the room.

In a wild thirst for novelty, Pomander had once penetrated to Goodman's Fields Theatre; there he had unguardedly put a question to a carpenter behind the scene; a seedy-black poet instantly pushed the carpenter away (down a trap it is thought), and answered it in seven pages, and in continuation was so vaguely communicative, that he drove Sir Charles back into the far west.

Sir Charles knew him again in a moment, and at sight of him bolted. They met at the door. "Ah! Mr. Triplet," said the fugitive, "enchanted — to wish you good morning!" and he plunged into the hiding-places of the theatre.

"That is a very polite gentleman," thought Triplet. He was followed by the call-boy, to whom he was explaining that his avocations, though numerous, would not prevent his paying Mr. Rich the compliment of waiting all day in his green-room, sooner than go without an answer to three important propositions, in which the town and the arts were concerned.

"What is your name?" said the boy of business to the man of words.

"Mr. Triplet," said Triplet.

"Triplet? There is something for you in the hall," said the urchin, and went off to fetch it.

"I knew it," said Triplet to himself; "they are accepted. There's a note in the hall to fix the reading." He then derided his own absurdity in having ever for a moment desponded. "Master of three arts, by each of which men grow fat, how was it possible he should starve all his days!"

He enjoyed a natural vanity for a few moments, and

then came more generous feelings. What sparkling eyes there would be in Lambeth to-day! The butcher, at sight of Mr. Rich's handwriting, would give him credit. Jane should have a new gown.

But when his tragedies were played, and he paid! El Dorado! his children should be the neatest in the street. Lysimachus and Roxalana should learn the English language, cost what it might; sausages should be diurnal; and he himself would not be puffed up, fat, lazy. No! he would work all the harder, be affable as ever, and above all, never swamp the father, husband, and honest man, in the poet and the blackguard of sentiment.

Next his reflections took a business turn.

"These tragedies — the scenery? Oh! I shall have to paint it myself. The heroes? Well, they have nobody who will play them as I should. (This was true!) It will be hard work, all this; but then, I shall be paid for it. I cannot go on this way; I must and will be paid separately for my branches."

Just as he came to this resolution, the boy returned with a brown-paper parcel, addressed to Mr. James Triplet. Triplet weighed it in his hand; it was heavy. "How is this?" cried he. "Oh! I see," said he, "these are the tragedies. He sends them to me for some trifling alterations: managers always do." Triplet then determined to adopt these alterations, if judicious; for, argued he sensibly enough: "Managers are practical men: and we, in the heat of composition, sometimes (*sic?*) say more than is necessary, and become tedious."

With that he opened the parcel, and looked for Mr. Rich's communication; it was not in sight. He had to look between the leaves of the manuscripts for it; it was not there. He shook them; it did not fall out. He shook them as a dog shakes a rabbit; nothing!

A CREATURE THAT SEEMED THE GODDESS OF GAYETY.

The tragedies were returned without a word. It took him some time to realize the full weight of the blow; but at last he saw that the manager of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, declined to take a tragedy by Triplet into consideration or bare examination.

He turned dizzy for a moment. Something between a sigh and a cry escaped him, and he sank upon a covered bench that ran along the wall. His poor tragedies fell here and there upon the ground, and his head went down upon his hands, which rested on Mrs. Woffington's picture. His anguish was so sharp, it choked his breath; when he recovered it, his eye bent down upon the picture. "Ah, Jane," he groaned, "you know this villanous world better than I!" He placed the picture gently on the seat (that picture must now be turned into bread), and slowly stooped for his tragedies; they had fallen hither and thither. He had to crawl about for them; he was an emblem of all the humiliations letters endure.

As he went after them on all-fours, more than one tear pattered on the dusty floor. Poor fellow! he was Triplet, and could not have died without tinging the death-rattle with some absurdity; but, after all, he was a father driven to despair; a castle-builder, with his work rudely scattered; an artist, brutally crushed and insulted by a greater dunce than himself.

Faint, sick, and dark, he sat a moment on the seat before he could find strength to go home and destroy all the hopes he had raised.

Whilst Triplet sat collapsed on the bench, fate sent into the room all in one moment, as if to insult his sorrow, a creature that seemed the goddess of gayety, impervious to a care. She swept in with a bold free step, for she was rehearsing a man's part, and thundered without rant, but with a spirit and fire, and pace, beyond

the conception of our poor tame actresses of 1852, these lines:

"Now, by the joys
Which my soul still has uncontrolled pursued,
I would not turn aside from my least pleasure,
Though all thy force were armed to bar my way;
But, like the birds, great Nature's happy commoners,
Rifle the sweets"—

"I beg — your par — don, sir!" holding the book on a level with her eye, she had nearly run over. "Two poets instead of one."

"Nay, madam," said Triplet, admiring, though sad, wretched, but polite, "pray continue. Happy the hearer, and still happier the author of verses so spoken. Ah!"

"Yes," replied the lady, "if you could persuade authors what we do for them, when we coax good music to grow on barren words. Are you an author, sir?" added she slyly.

"In a small way, madam. I have here three trifles — tragedies."

Mrs. Woffington looked askant at them like a shy mare.

"Ah, madam!" said Triplet, in one of his insane fits, "if I might but submit them to such a judgment as yours?"

He laid his hand on them. It was as when a strange dog sees us go to take up a stone.

The actress recoiled.

"I am no judge of such things," cried she hastily.

Triplet bit his lip. He could have killed her. It was provoking, people would rather be hung than read a manuscript. Yet what hopeless trash they will read in crowds, which was manuscript a day ago. *Les imbéciles!*

"No more is the manager of this theatre a judge of such things," cried the outraged quill-driver bitterly.

"What! has he accepted them?" said needle-tongue.

"No, madam, he has had them six months; and see, madam, he has returned them me without a word."

Triplet's lip trembled.

"Patience, my good sir," was the merry reply. "Tragic authors should possess that, for they teach it to their audiences. Managers, sir, are like Eastern monarchs, inaccessible but to slaves and sultanas. Do you know I called upon Mr. Rich fifteen times before I could see him?"

"You, madam? Impossible!"

"Oh, it was years ago, and he has paid a hundred pounds for each of those little visits. Well, now, let me see, fifteen times; you must write twelve more tragedies, and then he will read *one;* and when he has read it, he will favor you with his judgment upon it; and when you have got that, you will have what all the world knows is not worth a farthing. He! he! he!

> 'And like the birds, gay Nature's happy commoners,
> Rifle the sweets'— mum — mum — mum.'"

Her high spirits made Triplet sadder. To think that one word from this laughing lady would secure his work a hearing, and that he dared not ask her. She was up in the world, he was down. She was great, he was nobody. He felt a sort of chill at this woman — all brains and no heart. He took his picture and his plays under his arms and crept sorrowfully away.

The actress's eye fell on him as he went off like a fifth act. His Don Quixote face struck her. She had seen it before.

"Sir," said she.

"Madam," said Triplet, at the door.

"We have met before. There, don't speak, I'll tell

you who you are. Yours is a face that has been good to me, and I never forget them."

"Me, madam?" said Triplet, taken aback. "I trust I know what is due to you better than to be good to you, madam," said he, in his confused way.

"To be sure!" cried she, "it is Mr. Triplet, good Mr. Triplet!" And this vivacious dame, putting her book down, seized both Triplet's hands and shook them.

He shook hers warmly in return out of excess of timidity, and dropped tragedies, and kicked at them convulsively when they were down, for fear they should be in her way, and his mouth opened, and his eyes glared.

"Mr. Triplet," said the lady, "do you remember an Irish orange girl you used to give sixpence to at Goodman's Fields, and pat her on the head and give her good advice, like a good old soul as you were? She took the sixpence."

"Madam," said Trip, recovering a grain of pomp, "singular as it may appear, I remember the young person; she was very engaging. I trust no harm hath befallen her, for methought I discovered, in spite of her brogue, a beautiful nature in her."

"Go along wid your blarney," answered a rich brogue; "an is it the comanther ye'd be putting on poor little Peggy?"

"Oh! oh gracious!" gasped Triplet.

"Yes," was the reply; but into that "yes," she threw a whole sentence of meaning. "Fine cha-ney oranges!" chanted she, to put the matter beyond dispute.

"Am I really so honored as to have patted you on that queen-like head!" and he glared at it.

"On the same head which now I wear," replied she, pompously. "I kept it for the convaynience hintirely, only there's more in it. Well, Mr. Triplet, you see what time has done for me; now tell me whether he has been

as kind to you; are you going to speak to me, Mr. Triplet?"

As a decayed hunter stands lean and disconsolate, head poked forward like a goose's, but if hounds sweep by his paddock in full cry, followed by horses who are what he was not, he does by reason of the good blood that is and will be in his heart, *dum spiritus hoss regit artus*, cock his ears, erect his tail, and trot fiery to his extremest hedge, and look over it, nostril distended, mane flowing, and neigh the hunt onward like a trumpet; so Triplet, who had manhood at bottom, instead of whining out his troubles in the ear of encouraging beauty, as a sneaking spirit would, perked up, and resolved to put the best face upon it all before so charming a creature of the other sex.

"Yes, madam," cried he, with the air of one who could have smacked his lips, "Providence has blessed me with an excellent wife and four charming children. My wife was Miss Chatterton; you remember her?"

"Yes! Where is she playing now?"

"Why, madam, her health is too weak for it."

"Oh! — you were scene-painter. Do you still paint scenes?"

"With the pen, madam, not the brush; as the wags said, I transferred the distemper from my canvas to my imagination." And Triplet laughed uproariously.

When he had done, Mrs. Woffington, who had joined the laugh, inquired quietly whether his pieces had met with success.

"Eminent — in the closet; the stage is to come!" and he smiled absurdly again.

The lady smiled back.

"In short," said Triplet, recapitulating, "being blessed with health, and more tastes in the arts than most, and a cheerful spirit, I should be wrong, madam, to repine;

and this day, in particular, is a happy one," added the rose colorist, "since the great Mrs. Woffington has deigned to remember me, and call me friend."

Such was Triplet's summary.

Mrs. Woffington drew out her memorandum-book, and took down her summary of the crafty Triplet's facts. So easy is it for us Triplets to draw the wool over the eyes of women and Woffingtons.

"Triplet, discharged from scene-painting, wife, no engagement; four children supported by his pen — that is to say, starving; lose no time!"

She closed her book; and smiled, and said:

"I wish these things were comedies instead of trashedies, as the French call them; we would cut one in half, and slice away the finest passages, and then I would act in it; and you would see how the stage-door would fly open at sight of the author."

"Oh, Heaven!" said poor Trip, excited by this picture. "I'll go home, and write a comedy this moment."

"Stay!" said she; "you had better leave the tragedies with me."

"My dear madam! You will read them?"

"Ahem! I will make poor Rich read them."

"But, madam, he has rejected them."

"That is the first step. Reading them comes after, when it comes at all. What have you got in that green baize?"

"In this green baize?"

"Well, in this green baize, then."

"Oh, madam! nothing — nothing! To tell the truth, it is an adventurous attempt from memory. I saw you play Silvia, madam; I was so charmed, that I came every night. I took your face home with me — forgive my presumption, madam — and I produced this faint adumbration, which I expose with diffidence."

So then he took the green baize off.

The color rushed into her face; she was evidently gratified. Poor, silly Mrs. Triplet was doomed to be right about this portrait.

"I will give you a sitting," said she. "You will find painting dull faces a better trade than writing dull tragedies. Work for other people's vanity, not your own; that is the art of art. And now I want Mr. Triplet's address."

"On the fly-leaf of each work, madam," replied that florid author, "and also at the foot of every page which contains a particularly brilliant passage, I have been careful to insert the address of James Triplet, painter, actor, and dramatist, and Mrs. Woffington's humble, devoted servant." He bowed ridiculously low, and moved towards the door; but something gushed across his heart, and he returned with long strides to her. "Madam!" cried he, with a jaunty manner, "you have inspired a son of Thespis with dreams of eloquence, you have tuned in a higher key a poet's lyre, you have tinged a painter's existence with brighter colors, and — and" — His mouth worked still, but no more artificial words would come. He sobbed out, "and God in heaven bless you, Mrs. Woffington!" and ran out of the room.

Mrs. Woffington looked after him with interest, for this confirmed her suspicions; but suddenly her expression changed; she wore a look we have not yet seen upon her — it was a half-cunning, half-spiteful look; it was suppressed in a moment, she gave herself to her book, and presently Sir Charles Pomander sauntered into the room.

"Ah! what, Mrs. Woffington here?" said the diplomate.

"Sir Charles Pomander, I declare!" said the actress.

"I have just parted with an admirer of yours."

"I wish I could part with them all," was the reply.

"A pastoral youth, who means to win La Woffington by agricultural courtship — as shepherds woo in sylvan shades."

"With oaten pipe the rustic maids,"

quoth the Woffington, improvising.

The diplomate laughed, the actress laughed, and said, laughingly: "*Tell me what he says, word for word?*"

"It will only make you laugh."

"Well, and am I never to laugh, who provide so many laughs for you all?"

"*C'est juste.* You shall share the general merriment. Imagine a romantic soul, who adores you for *your simplicity!*"

"My simplicity! Am I so very simple?"

"No," said Sir Charles, monstrous dryly. "He says you are out of place on the stage, and wants to take the star from its firmament, and put it in a cottage."

"I am not a star," replied the Woffington, "I am only a meteor. And what does the man think I am to do without this (here she imitated applause) from my dear public's thousand hands?"

"You are to have this (he mimicked a kiss), from a single mouth, instead."

"He is mad! Tell me what more he says. Oh! don't stop to invent; I should detect you; and you would only spoil this man."

He laughed conceitedly. "I should spoil him! Well then, he proposes to be your friend rather than your lover, and keep you from being talked of. He! he! instead of adding to your *éclat.*"

"And if he is your friend, why don't you tell him my real character, and send him into the country?"

She said this rapidly and with an appearance of earnest. The diplomatist fell into the trap.

"I do," said he; "but he snaps his fingers at me and common sense and the world. I really think there is only one way to get rid of him, and with him of every annoyance."

"Ah! that would be nice."

"Delicious! I had the honor, madam, of laying certain proposals at your feet."

"Oh! yes — your letter, Sir Charles. I have only just had time to run my eye down it. Let us examine it together."

She took out the letter with a wonderful appearance of interest, and the diplomate allowed himself to fall into the absurd position to which she invited him. They put their two heads together over the letter.

"'A coach, a country-house, pin-money' — and I'm so tired of houses and coaches and pins. Oh, yes, here's something; what is this you offer me, up in this corner?"

Sir Charles inspected the place carefully, and announced that it was "his heart."

"And he can't even write it!" said she. "That word is 'earth.' Ah! well, you know best. There is your letter, Sir Charles."

She courtesied, returned him the letter, and resumed her study of Lothario.

"Favor me with your answer, madam," said her suitor.

"You have it," was the reply.

"Madam, I don't understand your answer," said Sir Charles, stiffly.

"I can't find you answers and understandings too," was the ladylike reply. "You must beat my answer into your understanding whilst I beat this man's verse into mine.

'And like the birds,'" etc.

Pomander recovered himself a little; he laughed with quiet insolence. "Tell me," said he, "do you really refuse?"

"My good soul," said Mrs. Woffington, "why this surprise? Are you so ignorant of the stage and the world, as not to know that I refuse such offers as yours every week of my life?"

"I know better," was the cool reply. She left it unnoticed.

"I have so many of these," continued she, "that I have begun to forget they are insults."

At this word the button broke off Sir Charles's foil.

"Insults, madam! They are the highest compliments you have left it in our power to pay you."

The other took the button off her foil.

"Indeed!" cried she, with well-feigned surprise. "Oh! I understand. To be your mistress, could be but a temporary disgrace; to be your wife, would be a lasting discredit," she continued. "And now, sir, having played your rival's game, and showed me your whole hand (a light broke in upon our diplomate), do something to recover the reputation of a man of the world. A gentleman is somewhere about in whom you have interested me by your lame satire; pray tell him I am in the green-room, with no better companion than this bad poet."

Sir Charles clenched his teeth.

"I accept the delicate commission," replied he, "that you may see how easily the man of the world drops what the rustic is eager to pick up."

"That is better," said the actress, with a provoking appearance of good humor. "You have a woman's tongue, if not her wit; but, my good soul," added she. with cool *hauteur*, "remember you have something to do of more importance than anything you can say."

"I accept your courteous dismissal, madam," said Pomander, grinding his teeth. "I will send a carpenter for your swain; and I leave you."

He bowed to the ground.

"Thanks for the double favor, good Sir Charles."

She courtesied to the floor.

Feminine vengeance! He had come between her and her love. All very clever, Mrs. Actress; but was it wise?

"I am revenged," thought Mrs. Woffington, with a little feminine smirk.

"I will be revenged," vowed Pomander, clenching his teeth.

CHAPTER VII.

Compare a November day with a May day. They are not more unlike than a beautiful woman in company with a man she is indifferent to or averse, and the same woman with the man of her heart by her side.

At sight of Mr. Vane, all her coldness and *nonchalance* gave way to a gentle complacency; and when she spoke to him, her voice, so clear and cutting in the late *assaut d'armes*, sank of its own accord into the most tender, delicious tone imaginable.

Mr. Vane and she made love. He pleased her, and she desired to please him. My reader knows her wit, her *finesse*, her fluency; but he cannot conceive how god-like was her way of making love. I can put a few of the corpses of her words upon paper, but where are the heavenly tones — now calm and convincing, now soft and melancholy, now thrilling with tenderness, now glowing with the fiery eloquence of passion? She told him that she knew the map of his face; that, for some days past, he had been subject to an influence adverse to her. She begged him calmly, for his own sake, to distrust false friends, and judge her by his own heart, eyes, and judgment. He promised her he would.

"And I do trust you, in spite of them all," said he, "for your face is the shrine of sincerity and candor. I alone know you."

Then she prayed him to observe the heartlessness of his sex, and to say whether she had done ill to hide the riches of her heart from the cold and shallow, and to keep them all for one honest man, "who will be my friend, I hope," said she, "as well as my lover."

"Ah!" said Vane, "that is my ambition."

"We actresses," said she, "make good the old proverb, 'Many lovers, but few friends.' And oh! 'tis we who need a friend. Will you be mine?"

Whilst he lived, he would.

In turn, he begged her to be generous, and tell him the way for him, Ernest Vane, inferior in wit and address to many of her admirers, to win her heart from them all.

This singular woman's answer is, I think, worth attention.

"Never act in my presence; never try to be eloquent or clever; never force a sentiment, or turn a phrase. Remember, I am the goddess of tricks. Do not descend to competition with me and the Pomanders of the world. At all littlenesses, you will ever be awkward in my eyes. And I am a woman. I must have a superior to love — lie open to my eye. Light itself is not more beautiful than the upright man whose bosom is open to the day. Oh, yes! fear not you will be my superior, dear; for in me honesty has to struggle against the habits of my art and life. Be simple and sincere, and I shall love you, and bless the hour you shone upon my cold, artificial life. Ah, Ernest!" said she, fixing on his eyes her own, the fire of which melted into tenderness as she spoke, "be my friend. Come between me and the temptations of an unprotected life, — the recklessness of a vacant heart."

He threw himself at her feet. He called her an angel. He told her he was unworthy of her, but that he would try and deserve her. Then he hesitated, and, trembling, he said, —

"I will be frank and loyal. Had I not better tell you everything? You will not hate me for a confession I make myself?"

"I shall like you better; oh, so much better!"

"Then I will own to you" —

"Oh! do not tell me you have ever loved before me! I could not bear to hear it," cried this inconsistent personage.

The other weak creature needed no more.

"I see plainly I never loved but you," said he.

"Let me hear that only!" cried she; "I am jealous even of the past. Say you never loved but me: never mind whether it is true. My child, you do not even yet know love. Ernest, shall I make you love — as none of your sex ever loved — with heart, and brain, and breath, and life, and soul?"

With these rapturous words she poured the soul of love into his eyes; he forgot everything in the world but her; he dissolved in present happiness, and vowed himself hers forever; and she, for her part, bade him but retain her esteem, and no woman ever went farther in love than she would. She was a true epicure: she had learned that passion, vulgar in itself, is godlike when based upon esteem.

This tender scene was interrupted by the call-boy, who brought Mrs. Woffington a note from the manager, informing her there would be no rehearsal. This left her at liberty, and she proceeded to take a somewhat abrupt leave of Mr. Vane. He was endeavoring to persuade her to let him be her companion until dinner-time (she was to be his guest), when Pomander entered the room.

Mrs. Woffington, however, was not to be persuaded; she excused herself on the score of a duty which she said she had to perform, and whispering as she passed Pomander, "Keep your own counsel," she went out rather precipitately.

Vane looked slightly disappointed.

Sir Charles, who had returned to see whether (as he

fully expected) she had told Vane everything, and who, at that moment, perhaps, would not have been sorry had Mrs. Woffington's lover called him to serious account, finding it was not her intention to make mischief, and not choosing to publish his own defeat, dropped quietly into his old line, and determined to keep the lovers in sight, and play for revenge. He smiled and said, "My good sir, nobody can hope to monopolize Mrs. Woffington: she has others to do justice to besides you."

To his surprise, Mr. Vane turned instantly round upon him, and looking him haughtily in the face, said, "Sir Charles Pomander, the settled malignity with which you pursue that lady is unmanly and offensive to me, who love her. Let our acquaintance cease here, if you please, or let her be sacred from your venomous tongue."

Sir Charles bowed stiffly, and replied, that it was only due to himself to withdraw a protection so little appreciated.

The two friends were in the very act of separating forever, when who should run in but Pompey the renegade? He darted up to Sir Charles and said, "Massa Pomannah, she in a coach, going to 10 Hercules Buildings. I'm in a hurry, Massa Pomannah."

"Where?" cried Pomander. "Say that again."

"10 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth. Me in a hurry, Massa Pomannah."

"Faithful child, there's a guinea for thee. Fly!"

The slave flew, and, taking a short cut, caught and fastened on to the slow vehicle in the Strand.

"It is a house of rendezvous," said Sir Charles, half to himself, half to Mr. Vane. He repeated in triumph, "It is a house of rendezvous." He then, recovering his *sang-froid*, and treating it all as a matter of course, explained that at 10 Hercules Buildings, was a fashionable shop, with entrances from two streets; that the best Indian

scarfs and shawls were sold there, and that ladies kept their carriages waiting an immense time in the principal street, whilst they were supposed to be in the shop or the show-room. He then went on to say that he had only this morning heard that the intimacy between Mrs. Woffington and a Colonel Murthwaite, although publicly broken off for prudential reasons, was still clandestinely carried on. She had, doubtless, slipped away to meet the colonel.

Mr. Vane turned pale.

"No! I will not suspect. I will not dog her like a bloodhound," cried he.

"I will," said Pomander.

"You? By what right?"

"The right of curiosity. I will know whether it is you who are imposed on, or whether you are right, and all the world is deceived in this woman."

He ran out; but, for all his speed, when he got into the street, there was the jealous lover at his elbow. They darted with all speed into the Strand: got a coach. Sir Charles, on the box, gave Jehu a guinea, and took the reins, and by a Niagara of whip-cord they attained Lambeth; and at length, to his delight, Pomander saw another coach before him with a gold-laced black slave behind it. The coach stopped, and the slave came to the door. The shop in question was a few hundred yards distant. The adroit Sir Charles not only stopped, but turned his coach, and let the horses crawl back towards London: he also flogged the side panels to draw the attention of Mr. Vane. That gentleman looked through the little circular window at the back of the vehicle, and saw a lady paying the coachman. There was no mistaking her figure. This lady then, followed at a distance by her slave, walked on towards Hercules Buildings; and it was his miserable fate to see her look

uneasily round, and at last glide in at a side door, close to the silk mercer's shop.

The carriage stopped. Sir Charles came himself to the door.

"Now, Vane," said he, "before I consent to go any further in this business, you must promise me to be cool and reasonable. I abhor absurdity; and there must be no swords drawn for this little hypocrite."

"I submit to no dictation," said Vane, white as a sheet.

"You have benefited so far by my knowledge," said the other, politely; "let me, who am self-possessed, claim some influence with you."

"Forgive me," said poor Vane. "My ang— my sorrow that such an angel should be a monster of deceit" — He could say no more.

They walked to the shop.

"How she peeped, this way, and that," said Pomander; "sly little Woffy!

"No; on second thoughts," said he, "it is the other street we must reconnoitre; and if we don't see her there, we will enter the shop, and by dint of this purse, we shall soon untie the knot of the Woffington riddle."

Vane leaned heavily on his tormentor.

"I am faint," said he.

"Lean on me, my dear friend," said Sir Charles. "Your weakness will leave you in the next street."

In the next street they discovered — nothing. In the shop they found — no Mrs. Woffington. They returned to the principal street. Vane began to hope there was no positive evidence. Suddenly, three stories up, a fiddle was heard. Pomander took no notice, but Vane turned red; this put Sir Charles upon the scent.

"Stay," said he. "Is not that an Irish tune?"

Vane groaned. He covered his face with his hands, and hissed out:

"It is her favorite tune."

"Aha!" said Pomander. "Follow me!"

They crept up the stairs, Pomander in advance; they heard the signs of an Irish orgie — a rattling jig played, and danced with the inspiriting interjections of that frolicsome nation. These sounds ceased after awhile, and Pomander laid his hand on his friend's shoulder:

"I prepare you," said he, "for what you are sure to see. This woman was an Irish bricklayer's daughter, and 'what is bred in the bone never comes out of the flesh;' you will find her sitting on some Irishman's knee, whose limbs are ever so much stouter than yours. You are the man of her head, and this is the man of her heart. These things would be monstrous, if they were not common; incredible, if we did not see them every day. But this poor fellow, whom probably she deceives as well as you, is not to be sacrificed like a dog to your unjust wrath; he is as superior to her, as you are to him."

"I will commit no violence," said Vane. "I still hope she is innocent."

Pomander smiled, and said he hoped so too.

"And if she is what you think, I will but show her she is known, and blaming myself as much as her — oh, yes! more than her! — I will go down this night to Shropshire, and never speak word to her again in this world or the next."

"Good," said Sir Charles.

"'Le bruit est pour le fat, la plainte est pour le sot,
L'honnête homme trompé s'éloigne et ne dit mot.'

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me."

Turning the handle gently, he opened the door like

lightning, and was in the room. Vane's head peered over his shoulder. She was actually there!

For once in her life, the cautious artful woman was taken by surprise. She gave a little scream, and turned as red as fire. But Sir Charles surprised somebody else even more than he did poor Mrs. Woffington.

It would be impertinent to tantalize my reader, but I flatter myself this history is not written with power enough to do that, and I may venture to leave him to guess whom Sir Charles Pomander surprised more than he did the actress, while I go back for the lagging sheep.

CHAPTER VIII.

James Triplet, water in his eye, but fire in his heart, went home on wings. Arrived there, he anticipated curiosity by informing all hands he should answer no questions. Only in the intervals of a work, which was to take the family out of all its troubles, he should gradually unfold a tale, verging on the marvellous — a tale whose only fault was, that fiction, by which alone the family could hope to be great, paled beside it. He then seized some sheets of paper, fished out some old dramatic sketches, and a list of *dramatis personæ*, prepared years ago, and plunged into a comedy. As he wrote, true to his promise, he painted, Triplet-wise, that story which we have coldly related, and made it appear to all but Mrs. Triplet, that he was under the tutela, or express protection of Mrs. Woffington, who would push his fortunes until the only difficulty would be to keep arrogance out of the family heart.

Mrs. Triplet groaned aloud. "You have brought the picture home, I see," said she.

"Of course I have. She is going to give me a sitting."

"At what hour of what day?" said Mrs. Triplet, with a world of meaning.

"She did not say," replied Triplet, avoiding his wife's eye.

"I know she did not," was the answer. "I would rather you had brought me the ten shillings than this fine story," said she.

"Wife," said Triplet, "don't put me into a frame of mind in which successful comedies are not written."

He scribbled away, but his wife's despondency told upon the man of disappointments. Then he stuck fast; then he became fidgety.

"Do keep those children quiet!" said the father.

"Hush, my dears," said the mother; "let your father write. Comedy seems to give you more trouble than tragedy, James," added she soothingly.

"Yes," was his answer. "Sorrow comes, somehow, more natural to me; but for all that I have got a bright thought, Mrs. Triplet. Listen, all of you. You see, Jane, they are all at a sumptuous banquet, all the *dramatis personæ*, except the poet."

Triplet went on writing, and reading his work out: "Music, sparkling wine, massive plate, rose-water in the hand-glasses, soup, fish — shall I have three sorts of fish? I will; they are cheap in this market. Ah! Fortune, you wretch, here, at least, I am your master, and I'll make you know it — venison," wrote Triplet, with a malicious grin, "game, pickles, and provocatives in the centre of the table, then up jumps one of the guests, and says he" —

"Oh, dear, I am so hungry."

This was not from the comedy, but from one of the boys.

"And so am I," cried a girl.

"That is an absurd remark, Lysimachus," said Triplet, with a suspicious calmness.

"How can a boy be hungry three hours after breakfast?"

"But, father, there was no breakfast for breakfast."

"Now I ask you, Mrs. Triplet," appealed the author, "how am I to write comic scenes if you let Lysimachus and Roxalana here, put the heavy business in every five minutes?"

"Forgive them; the poor things are hungry."

"Then let them be hungry in another room," said the irritated scribe. "They shan't cling round my pen, and paralyze it just when it is going to make all our fortunes; but you women," snapped Triplet the just, "have no consideration for people's feelings. Send them all to bed, every man jack of them!"

Finding the conversation taking this turn, the brats raised an unanimous howl.

Triplet darted a fierce glance at them. "Hungry, hungry!" cried he; "is that a proper expression to use before a father who is sitting down here all gayety (scratching wildly with his pen) and hilarity (scratch), to write a com — com —" he choked a moment; then in a very different voice, all sadness and tenderness, he said, "Where's the youngest — where's Lucy? As if I didn't know you are hungry."

Lucy came to him directly. He took her on his knee, pressed her gently to his side, and wrote silently. The others were still.

"Father," said Lucy, aged five, the germ of a woman, "I am not tho very hungry."

"And I am not hungry at all," said bluff Lysimachus, taking his sister's cue; then going upon his own tact he added, "I had a great piece of bread and butter yesterday!"

"Wife, they will drive me mad!" and he dashed at the paper.

The second boy explained to his mother, *sotto voce:* "Mother, he *made* us hungry out of his book."

"It is a beautiful book," said Lucy. "Is it a cookery book?"

Triplet roared; "Do you hear that?" inquired he, all trace of ill-humor gone. "Wife," he resumed, after a gallant scribble, "I took that sermon I wrote."

"And beautiful it was, James. I'm sure it quite

cheered me up with thinking, that we shall all be dead before so very long."

"Well, the reverend gentleman would not have it. He said it was too hard upon sin. 'You run at the devil like a mad bull,' said he. 'Sell it in Lambeth, sir; *here* calmness and decency are before everything,' says he. 'My congregation expect to go to heaven down hill. Perhaps the chaplain of Newgate might give you a crown for it,' said he," and Triplet dashed viciously at the paper. "Ah!" sighed he, "if my friend Mrs. Woffington would but drop these stupid comedies and take to tragedy, this house would soon be all smiles."

"O James!" replied Mrs. Triplet, almost peevishly, "how can you expect anything but fine words from that woman? You won't believe what all the world says. You will trust to your own good heart."

"I haven't a good heart," said the poor honest fellow. "I spoke like a brute to you just now."

"Never mind, James," said the woman; "I wonder how you put up with me at all — a sick, useless creature. I often wish to die, for your sake. I know you would do better. I am such a weight round your neck."

The man made no answer, but he put Lucy gently down, and went to the woman, and took her forehead to his bosom, and held it there; and after awhile, returned with silent energy to his comedy.

"Play us a tune on the fiddle, father."

"Ay, do, husband. That helps you often in your writing."

Lysimachus brought him the fiddle, and Triplet essayed a merry tune; but it came out so doleful, that he shook his head, and laid the instrument down. Music must be in the heart, or it will come out of the fingers — notes, not music.

"No," said he; "let us be serious and finish this comedy slap off. Perhaps it hitches because I forgot to invoke the comic muse. She must be a black-hearted jade, if she doesn't come with merry notions to a poor devil, starving in the midst of his hungry little ones."

"We are past help from heathen goddesses," said the woman. "We must pray to Heaven to look down upon us and our children."

The man looked up with a very bad expression on his countenance.

"You forget," said he, sullenly, "our street is very narrow, and the opposite houses are very high."

"James!"

"How can Heaven be expected to see what honest folk endure in so dark a hole as this?" cried the man fiercely.

"James," said the woman, with fear and sorrow, "what words are these?"

The man rose, and flung his pen upon the floor.

"Have we given honesty a fair trial — yes or no?"

"No!" said the woman, without a moment's hesitation; "not till we die as we have lived. Heaven is higher than the sky; children," said she, lest perchance her husband's words should have harmed their young souls — "the sky is above the earth, and heaven is higher than the sky; and Heaven is just."

"I suppose it is so," said the man, a little cowed by her. "Everybody says so. I think so, at bottom, myself; but I can't see it. I want to see it, but I can't!" cried he fiercely. "Have my children offended Heaven? They will starve — they will die! If I was Heaven, I'd be just, and send an angel to take these children's part. They cried to me for bread — I had no bread; so I gave them hard words. The moment I had done that, I knew it was all over. God knows, it took a long while to break my heart; but it is broken at last; quite, quite broken! broken! broken!"

And the poor thing laid his head upon the table, and sobbed, beyond all power of restraint. The children cried round him, scarce knowing why; and Mrs. Triplet could only say, "My poor husband!" and prayed and wept upon the couch where she lay.

It was at this juncture that a lady, who had knocked gently and unheard, opened the door, and with a light step, entered the apartment; but no sooner had she caught sight of Triplet's anguish, than saying hastily, "Stay, I forgot something," she made as hasty an exit.

This gave Triplet a moment to recover himself; and Mrs. Woffington, whose lynx-eye had comprehended all at a glance, and who had determined at once what line to take, came flying in again saying: —

"Wasn't somebody inquiring for an angel? Here I am. See, Mr. Triplet," and she showed him a note, which said, "Madam, you are an angel." — "From a perfect stranger," explained she; "so it must be true."

"Mrs. Woffington," said Mr. Triplet to his wife.

Mrs. Woffington planted herself in the middle of the floor, and with a comical glance, setting her arms akimbo, uttered a shrill whistle.

"Now you will see another angel — there are two sorts of them."

Pompey came in with a basket: she took it from him.

"Lucifer, avaunt!" cried she, in a terrible tone, that drove him to the wall; "and wait outside the door," added she, conversationally.

"I heard you were ill, ma'am, and I have brought you some physic — black draughts from Burgundy;" and she smiled. And, recovered from their first surprise, young and old began to thaw beneath that witching, irresistible smile. "Mrs. Triplet, I have come to give your husband a sitting; will you allow me to eat my little luncheon with you? I am so hungry." Then she

clapped her hands, and in ran Pompey. She sent him for a pie she professed to have fallen in love with at the corner of the street.

"Mother," said Alcibiades, "will the lady give me a bit of her pie?"

"Hush! you rude boy!" cried the mother.

"She is not much of a lady if she does not," cried Mrs. Woffington. "Now, children, first let us look at — ahem — a comedy. Nineteen *dramatis personæ!* What do you say, children, shall we cut out seven, or nine? that is the question. You can't bring your armies into our drawing-rooms, Mr. Dagger-and-bowl. Are you the Marlborough of comedy? Can you marshal battalions on a Turkey carpet, and make gentlefolks witty in platoons? What is this in the first act? A duel, and both wounded! You butcher!"

"They are not to die, ma'am!" cried Triplet, deprecatingly; "upon my honor," said he, solemnly, spreading his hands on his bosom.

"Do you think I'll trust their lives with you? No! Give me a pen: this is the way *we* run people through the body." (Then she wrote "business:" Araminta looks out of the garret window. Combatants drop their swords, put their hands to their hearts, and stagger off O. P. and P. S.) "Now, children, who helps me to lay the cloth?"

"I!"

"And I!" (The children run to the cupboard.)

Mrs. Triplet (half rising). Madam, I — can't think of allowing you.

Mrs. Woffington replied, "Sit down, madam, or I must use brute force. If you are ill, be ill — till I make you well. Twelve plates, quick! Twenty-four knives, quicker! Forty-eight forks, quickest!" She met the children with the cloth and laid it; then she met them

again and laid knives and forks, all at full gallop, which mightily excited the bairns. Pompey came in with the pie; Mrs. Woffington took it and set it before Triplet.

Mrs. Woffington. Your coat, Mr. Triplet, if you please.

Mr. Triplet. My coat, madam!

Mrs. Woffington. Yes, off with it, — there's a hole in it, — and carve. (Then she whipped to the other end of the table and stitched like wild-fire.) Be pleased to cast your eyes on that, Mrs. Triplet. Pass it to the lady, young gentleman. Fire away, Mr. Triplet, never mind us women. Woffington's housewife, ma'am, fearful to the eye, only it holds everything in the world, and there is a small space for everything else — to be returned by the bearer. Thank you, sir. (Stitches away like lightning at the coat.) Eat away, children! now is your time. When once I begin, the pie will soon end; I do everything so quick.

Roxalana. The lady sews quicker than you, mother.

Woffington. Bless the child, don't come so near my sword-arm; the needle will go into your eye, and out at the back of your head.

This nonsense made the children giggle.

"The needle will be lost — the child no more — enter undertaker — house turned topsy-turvy — father shows Woffington to the door — off she goes with a face as long and dismal as some people's comedies — no names — crying fine cha-ney oran-ges."

The children, all but Lucy, screeched with laughter.

Lucy said gravely, —

"Mother, the lady is very funny."

"You will be as funny, when you are as well paid for it."

This just hit poor Trip's notion of humor; and he began to choke, with his mouth full of pie.

"James, take care," said Mrs. Triplet, sad and solemn.

James looked up.

"My wife is a good woman, madam," said he; "but deficient in an important particular."

"O James!"

"Yes, my dear. I regret to say you have no sense of humor; nummore than a cat, Jane."

"What! because the poor thing can't laugh at your comedy?"

"No, ma'am; but she laughs at nothing."

"Try her with one of your tragedies, my lad."

"I am sure, James," said the poor, good, lackadaisical woman, "if I don't laugh, it is not for want of the will. I used to be a very hearty laugher," whined she; "but I haven't laughed this two years."

"Oh, indeed!" said the Woffington. "Then the next two years you shall do nothing else."

"Ah, madam!" said Triplet. "That passes the art, even of the great comedian."

"Does it?" said the actress coolly.

Lucy. She is not a comedy lady. You don't ever cry, pretty lady?

Woffington (ironically). Oh! of course not.

Lucy (confidentially). Comedy is crying. Father cried all the time he was writing his one.

Triplet turned red as fire.

"Hold your tongue," said he; "I was bursting with merriment. Wife, our children talk too much; they put their noses into everything, and criticise their own father."

"Unnatural offspring!" laughed the visitor.

"And when they take up a notion, Socrates couldn't convince them to the contrary. For instance, madam, all this morning they thought fit to assume that they were starving."

"So we were," said Lysimachus, "until the angel came, and the devil went for the pie."

"There, there, there! Now, you mark my words; we shall never get that idea out of their heads" —

"Until," said Mrs. Woffington, lumping a huge cut of pie into Roxalana's plate, "we put a very different idea into their stomachs." This and the look she cast on Mrs. Triplet, fairly caught that good, though sombre personage. She giggled; put her hand to her face, and said, "I'm sure I ask your pardon, ma'am."

It was no use; the comedian had determined they should all laugh, and they were made to laugh. Then she rose, and showed them how to drink healths *à la Française;* and keen were her little admirers, to touch her glass with theirs. And the pure wine she had brought did Mrs. Triplet much good, too; though not so much as the music and sunshine of her face and voice. Then, when their stomachs were full of good food, and the soul of the grape tingled in their veins, and their souls glowed under her great magnetic power, she suddenly seized the fiddle, and showed them another of her enchantments. She put it on her knee, and played a tune that would have made gout, colic, and phthisic dance upon their last legs. She played to the eye as well as to the ear, with such a smart gesture of the bow, and such a radiance of face as she looked at them, that whether the music came out of her wooden shell, or her horsehair wand, or her bright self, seemed doubtful. They pranced on their chairs; they could not keep still. She jumped up, so did they. She gave a wild Irish horroo. She put the fiddle in Triplet's hand.

"The wind that shakes the barley, ye divil!" cried she.

Triplet went *hors de lui;* he played like Paganini or an intoxicated demon. Woffington covered the buckle in gallant style; she danced, the children danced. Triplet fiddled and danced, and flung his limbs in wild dislo-

cation; the wine-glasses danced; and last, Mrs. Triplet was observed to be bobbing about on her sofa, in a monstrous absurd way, droning out the tune, and playing her hands with mild enjoyment, all to herself. Woffington pointed out this pantomimic soliloquy to the two boys, with a glance full of fiery meaning. This was enough: with a fiendish yell, they fell upon her, and tore her, shrieking, off the sofa. And lo! when she was once launched, she danced up to her husband, and set to him with a meek deliberation, that was as funny as any part of the scene. So then the mover of all this slipped on one side, and let the stone of merriment roll — and roll it did. There was no swimming, sprawling, or irrelevant frisking; their feet struck the ground for every note of the fiddle, pat as its echo, their faces shone, their hearts leaped, and their poor frozen natures came out and warmed themselves at the glowing melody; a great sunbeam had come into their abode, and these human motes danced in it. The elder ones recovered their gravity first. They sat down breathless, and put their hands to their hearts; they looked at one another, and then at the goddess who had revived them. Their first feeling was wonder; were they the same, who, ten minutes ago, were weeping together? Yes! ten minutes ago they were rayless, joyless, hopeless. Now, the sun was in their hearts, and sorrow and sighing were fled, as fogs disperse before the god of day. It was magical; could a mortal play upon the soul of man, woman, and child like this? Happy Woffington! and suppose this was more than half acting, but such acting as Triplet never dreamed of; and to tell the honest simple truth, I, myself, should not have suspected it: but children are sharper than one would think, and Alcibiades Triplet told, in after years, that when they were all dancing except the lady, he caught sight of her

face, and it was quite, quite grave, and even sad: but as often as she saw him look at her, she smiled at him so gayly, he couldn't believe it was the same face.

If it was art, glory be to such art so worthily applied! and honor to such creatures as this, that come like sunshine into poor men's houses, and tune drooping hearts to daylight and hope!

The wonder of these worthy people soon changed to gratitude. Mrs. Woffington stopped their mouths at once.

"No, no!" cried she; "if you really love me, no scenes; I hate them. Tell these brats to kiss me, and let me go. I must sit for my picture after dinner; it is a long way to Bloomsbury Square."

The children needed no bidding; they clustered round her, and poured out their innocent hearts as children only do.

"I shall pray for you after father and mother," said one.

"I shall pray for you after daily bread," said Lucy, "because we were *tho* hungry till you came!"

"My poor children!" cried Woffington, and hard to grown-up actors, as she called us, but sensitive to children, she fairly melted as she embraced them. It was at this precise juncture that the door was unceremoniously opened, and the two gentlemen burst upon the scene!

My reader now guesses whom Sir Charles Pomander surprised more than he did Mrs. Woffington. He could not for the life of him comprehend what she was doing, and what was her ulterior object. The *nil admirari* of the fine gentleman deserted him, and he gazed open-mouthed, like the veriest chaw-bacon.

The actress, unable to extricate herself in a moment from the children, stood there like Charity, in New Col-

lege Chapel, whilst the mother kissed her hand, and the father quietly dropped tears, like some leaden water-god in the middle of a fountain.

Vane turned hot and cold by turns, with joy and shame. Pomander's genius came to the aid of their embarrassment.

"Follow my lead," whispered he. "What! Mrs. Woffington here!" cried he; then he advanced business-like to Triplet. "We are aware, sir, of your various talents, and are come to make a demand on them. I, sir, am the unfortunate possessor of frescos; time has impaired their indelicacy, no man can restore it as you can."

"Augh! sir! sir!" said the gratified goose.

"My Cupid's bows are walking-sticks, and my Venus's noses are snubbed. You must set all that straight, on your own terms, Mr. Triplet."

"In a single morning all shall bloom again, sir! Whom would you wish them to resemble in feature? I have lately been praised for my skill in portraiture." (Glancing at Mrs. Woffington.)

"Oh!" said Pomander, carelessly, "you need not go far for Venuses and Cupids, I suppose?"

"I see, sir; my wife and children. Thank you, sir; thank you."

Pomander stared; Mrs. Woffington laughed.

Now it was Vane's turn.

"Let me have a copy of verses from your pen. I shall have five pounds at your disposal for them."

"The world has found me out!" thought Triplet, blinded by his vanity. "The subject, sir?"

"No matter," said Vane, "no matter."

"Oh! of course it does not matter to me," said Triplet, with some *hauteur*, and assuming poetic omnipotence. "Only, when one knows the subject, one can sometimes make the verses apply better."

"Write, then, since you are so confident, upon Mrs. Woffington."

"Ah! that is a subject! They shall be ready in an hour!" cried Trip, in whose imagination Parnassus was a raised counter. He had in a tea-cup some lines on Venus and Mars, which he could not but feel would fit Thalia and Crœsus, or Genius and Envy, equally well. "In one hour, sir," said Triplet, "the article shall be executed, and delivered at your house."

Mrs. Woffington called Vane to her, with an engaging smile. A month ago, he would have hoped she would not have penetrated him and Sir Charles; but he knew her better now. He came trembling.

"Look me in the face, Mr. Vane," said she gently, but firmly.

"I cannot!" said he. "How can I ever look you in the face again?"

"Ah! you disarm me! But I must strike you, or this will never end. Did I not promise that when you had earned my esteem, I would tell you — what no mortal knows — Ernest, my whole story? I delay the confession; it will cost me so many blushes — so many tears! And yet I hope, if you knew all, you would pity and forgive me. Meantime, did I ever tell you a falsehood?"

"Oh, no!"

"Why doubt me then, when I tell you that I hold all your sex cheap, but you? Why suspect me of Heaven knows what, at the dictation of a heartless, brainless fop — on the word of a known liar, like the world?"

Black lightning flashed from her glorious eyes, as she administered this royal rebuke. Vane felt what a poor creature he was, and his face showed such burning shame and contrition, that he obtained his pardon without speaking.

"There," said she, kindly, "do not let us torment one

another. I forgive you. Let me make you happy, Ernest. Is that a great favor to ask? I can make you happier than your brightest dream of happiness, if you will let yourself be happy."

They rejoined the others; but Vane turned his back on Pomander, and would not look at him.

"Sir Charles," said Mrs. Woffington, gayly; for she scorned to admit the fine gentleman to the rank of a permanent enemy, "you will be of our party, I trust, at dinner?"

"Why, no, madam; I fear I cannot give myself that pleasure to-day." Sir Charles did not choose to swell the triumph. "Mr. Vane, good day!" said he, rather dryly. "Mr. Triplet — madam — your most obedient!" and, self-possessed at top, but at bottom crestfallen, he bowed himself away.

Sir Charles, however, on descending the stair and gaining the street, caught sight of a horseman, riding uncertainly about, and making his horse curvet to attract attention.

He soon recognized one of his own horses, and upon it the servant he had left behind to dog that poor innocent country lady. The servant sprang off his horse and touched his hat. He informed his master that he had kept with the carriage until ten o'clock this morning, when he had ridden away from it at Barnet, having duly pumped the servants as opportunity offered.

"Who is she?" cried Sir Charles.

"Wife of a Cheshire squire, Sir Charles," was the reply.

"His name? Whither goes she in town?"

"Her name is Mrs. Vane, Sir Charles. She is going to her husband."

"Curious!" cried Sir Charles. "I wish she had no husband. No! I wish she came from Shropshire," and he chuckled at the notion.

"If you please, Sir Charles," said the man, "is not Willoughby in Cheshire?"

"No," cried his master; "it is in Shropshire. What! eh! Five guineas for you if that lady comes from Willoughby in Shropshire."

"That is where she comes from then, Sir Charles, and she is going to Bloomsbury Square."

"How long have they been married?"

"Not more than twelve months, Sir Charles."

Pomander gave the man ten guineas instead of five on the spot.

Reader, it was too true! Mr. Vane — the good, the decent, the church-goer — Mr. Vane, whom Mrs. Woffington had selected to improve her morals — Mr. Vane was a married man!

CHAPTER IX.

As soon as Pomander had drawn his breath and realized this discovery he darted up-stairs, and with all the demure calmness he could assume, told Mr. Vane, whom he met descending, that he was happy to find his engagements permitted him to join the party in Bloomsbury Square. He then flung himself upon his servant's horse.

Like Iago, he saw the indistinct outline of a glorious and a most malicious plot; it lay crude in his head and heart at present; thus much he saw clearly, that if he could time Mrs. Vane's arrival so that she should pounce upon the Woffington at her husband's table, he might be present at and enjoy the public discomfiture of a man and woman who had wounded his vanity. Bidding his servant make the best of his way to Bloomsbury Square, Sir Charles galloped in that direction himself, intending first to inquire whether Mrs. Vane was arrived, and if not, to ride towards Islington and meet her. His plan was frustrated by an accident; galloping round a corner, his horse did not change his leg cleverly, and, the pavement being also loose, slipped and fell on his side, throwing his rider upon the *trottoir*. The horse got up and trembled violently, but was unhurt. The rider lay motionless, except that his legs quivered on the pavement. They took him up and conveyed him into a druggist's shop, the master of which practised chirurgery. He had to be sent for; and before he could be found, Sir Charles recovered his reason — so much so, that when the chirurgeon approached with his fleam to bleed him, according to the practice of the day, the patient drew his

sword, and assured the other he would let out every drop of blood in his body if he touched him.

He of the shorter but more lethal weapon hastily retreated. Sir Charles flung a guinea on the counter, and mounting his horse rode him off rather faster than before this accident.

There was a dead silence!

"I believe that gentleman to be the devil," said a thoughtful bystander. The crowd (it was a century ago) assented *nem. con.*

Sir Charles arrived in Bloomsbury Square, found that the whole party was assembled. He therefore ordered his servant to parade before the door, and if he saw Mrs. Vane's carriage enter the square, to let him know, if possible, before she could reach the house. On entering he learned that Mr. Vane and his guests were in the garden (a very fine one), and joined them there.

Mrs. Vane demands another chapter, in which I will tell the reader who she was, and what excuse her husband had for his *liaison* with Margaret Woffington.

CHAPTER X.

Mabel Chester was the beauty and toast of South Shropshire. She had refused the hand of half the country squires in a circle of some dozen miles, till at last Mr. Vane became her suitor. Besides a handsome face and person, Mr. Vane had accomplishments his rivals did not possess. He read poetry to her on mossy banks, an hour before sunset, and awakened sensibilities, which her other suitors shocked, and they them.

The lovely Mabel had a taste for beautiful things, without any excess of that severe quality called judgment.

I will explain. If you or I, reader, had read to her in the afternoon, amidst the smell of roses and eglantine, the chirp of the mavis, the hum of bees, the twinkling of butterflies, and the tinkle of distant sheep, something that combined all these sights, and sounds, and smells — say Milton's musical picture of Eden, P. L., lib. 3, and after that "Triplet on Kew," she would have instantly pronounced in favor of "Eden;" but if *we* had read her "Milton," and Mr. Vane had read her "Triplet," she would have as unhesitatingly preferred "Kew" to "Paradise."

She was a true daughter of Eve; the lady who, when an angel was telling her and her husband the truths of heaven in heaven's own music, slipped away into the kitchen, because she preferred hearing the story at second-hand, incumbered with digressions, and in mortal but marital accents.

When her mother, who guarded Mabel like a dragon, told her Mr. Vane was not rich enough, and she really

must not give him so many opportunities, Mabel cried and embraced the dragon, and said "O mother!" The dragon, finding her ferocity dissolving, tried to shake her off, but the goose would cry and embrace the dragon till it melted.

By and by Mr. Vane's uncle died suddenly and left him the great Stoken Church estate, and a trunk full of Jacobuses and Queen Anne's guineas — his own hoard and his father's — then the dragon spake comfortably, and said, —

"My child, he is now the richest man in Shropshire. He will not think of you now; so steel your heart."

Then Mabel, contrary to all expectations, did not cry; but with flushing cheek, pledged her life upon Ernest's love and honor. And Ernest, as soon as the funeral, etc., left him free, galloped to Mabel, to talk of our good fortune. The dragon had done him injustice; that was not his weak point. So they were married! and they were very, very happy. But one month after, the dragon died, and that was their first grief; but they bore it together.

And Vane was not like the other Shropshire squires. His idea of pleasure was something his wife could share. He still rode, walked, and sat with her, and read to her, and composed songs for her, and about her, which she played and sang prettily enough, in her quiet lady-like way, and in a voice of honey dropping from the comb. Then she kept a keen eye upon him; and when she discovered what dishes he liked, she superintended those herself; and observing that he never failed to eat of a certain lemon pudding the dragon had originated, she always made this pudding herself, and she never told her husband she made it.

The first seven months of their marriage was more like blue sky than brown earth; and if any one had told

Mabel that her husband was a mortal, and not an angel, sent to her, that her days and nights might be unmixed, uninterrupted heaven, she could hardly have realized the information.

When a vexatious litigant began to contest the will by which Mr. Vane was Lord of Stoken Church, and Mr. Vane went up to London to concert the proper means of defeating this attack, Mrs. Vane would gladly have compounded by giving the man two or three thousand acres, or the whole estate, if he wouldn't take less, not to rob her of her husband for a month; but she was docile, as she was amorous; so she cried (out of sight) a week, and let her darling go, with every misgiving a loving heart could have; but one! and that one, her own heart told her, was impossible.

The month rolled away — no symptom of a return. For this, Mr. Vane was not, in fact, to blame; but, towards the end of the next month, business became a convenient excuse. When three months had passed, Mrs. Vane became unhappy. She thought he too must feel the separation. She offered to come to him. He answered uncandidly. He urged the length, the fatigue of the journey. She was silenced; but some time later she began to take a new view of his objections. "He is so self-denying," said she. "Dear Ernest, he longs for me; but he thinks it selfish to let me travel so far alone to see him."

Full of this idea, she yielded to her love. She made her preparations, and wrote to him that if he did not forbid her peremptorily, he must expect to see her at his breakfast-table in a very few days.

Mr. Vane concluded this was a jest, and did not answer this letter at all.

Mrs. Vane started. She travelled with all speed; but coming to a halt at ———, she wrote to her husband

that she counted on being with him at four of the clock on Thursday.

This letter preceded her arrival by a few hours. It was put into his hand at the same time with a note from Mrs. Woffington; telling him she should be at a rehearsal at Covent Garden. Thinking his wife's letter would keep, he threw it on one side into a sort of a tray; and after a hurried breakfast, went out of his house to the theatre. He returned, as we are aware, with Mrs. Woffington; and also, at her request, with Mr. Cibber, for whom they called on their way. He had forgotten his wife's letter, and was entirely occupied with his guests.

Sir Charles Pomander joined them, and found Mr. Colander, the head domestic of the London establishment, cutting with a pair of scissors every flower Mrs. Woffington fancied, that lady having a passion for flowers.

Colander, during his temporary absence from the interior, had appointed James Burdock to keep the house, and receive the two remaining guests, should they arrive.

This James Burdock was a faithful old country servant, who had come up with Mr. Vane, but left his heart at Willoughby. James Burdock had for some time been ruminating, and his conclusion was, that his mistress, Miss Mabel (as by force of habit he called her), was not treated as she deserved.

Burdock had been imported into Mr. Vane's family by Mabel; he had carried her in his arms when she was a child; he had held her upon a donkey when she was a little girl; and when she became a woman, it was he who taught her to stand close to her horse, and give him her foot, and spring while he lifted her steadily but strongly into her saddle, and when there, it was he who

had instructed her that a horse was not a machine, that galloping tires it in time, and that galloping it on the hard road hammers it to pieces. "I taught the girl," thought James within himself.

This honest silver-haired old fellow seemed so ridiculous to Colander, the smooth, supercilious Londoner, that he deigned sometimes to converse with James, in order to quiz him. This very morning they had had a conversation.

"Poor Miss Mabel! dear heart. A twelvemonth married, and nigh six months of it a widow, or next door."

"We write to her, James, and entertain her replies, which are at considerable length."

"Ay, but we don't read 'em!" said James, with an uneasy glance at the tray.

"Invariably, at our leisure; meantime we make ourselves happy amongst the wits and the sirens."

"And she do make others happy among the poor and the ailing."

"Which shows," said Colander, superciliously, "the difference of tastes."

Burdock, whose eye had never been off his mistress's handwriting, at last took it up and said, "Master Colander, do if ye please, sir, take this into master's dressing-room, do now?"

Colander looked down on the missive with dilating eye. "Not a bill, James Burdock," said he, reproachfully.

"A bill! bless ye, no. A letter from missus."

No, the dog would not take it in to his master: and poor James, with a sigh, replaced it in the tray.

This James Burdock, then, was left in charge of the hall by Colander, and it so happened that the change was hardly effected, before a hurried knocking came to the street door.

"Ay, ay!" grumbled Burdock, "I thought it would not be long. London for knocking and ringing all day, and ringing and knocking all night." He opened the door reluctantly and suspiciously, and in darted a lady, whose features were concealed by a hood. She glided across the hall, as if she was making for some point, and old James shuffled after her, crying, "Stop, stop, young woman. What is your name, young woman?"

"Why, James Burdock," cried the lady, removing her hood, "have you forgotten your mistress?"

"Mistress! Why, Miss Mabel, I ask your pardon, madam — here, John, Margery!"

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Vane.

"But where are your trunks, miss? And where's the coach, and Darby and Joan? To think of their drawing you all the way here! I'll have 'em into your room directly, ma'am. Miss, you've come just in time."

"What a dear, good, stupid old thing you are, James! Where is Ernest — Mr. Vane? James, is he well and happy? I want to surprise him."

"Yes, ma'am," said James, looking down.

"I left the stupid old coach at Islington, James. The something — pin was loose, or I don't know what. Could I wait two hours there? So I came on by myself; you wicked old man, you let me talk, and don't tell me how he is."

"Master is main well, ma'am, and thank you," said old Burdock, confused and uneasy.

"But is he happy? Of course he is. Are we not to meet to-day after six months? Ah! but never mind, they *are* gone by."

"Lord bless her!" thought the faithful old fellow. "If sitting down and crying could help her, I wouldn't be long."

By this time they were in the banqueting-room, and

at the preparations there Mabel gave a start; she then colored. "Oh! he has invited his friends to make acquaintance. I had rather we had been alone all this day and to-morrow. But he must not know that. No; *his* friends are *my* friends, and shall be, too," thought the country wife. She then glanced with some misgiving at her travelling attire, and wished she had brought *one* trunk with her.

"James," said she, "where is my room? And mind, I forbid you to tell a soul I am come."

"Your room, Miss Mabel?"

"Well, any room where there is looking-glass and water."

She then went to a door which opened in fact on a short passage leading to a room occupied by Mr. Vane himself.

"No, no!" cried James. "That is master's room."

"Well, is not master's room mistress's room, old man? But stay; is he there?"

"No, ma'am; he is in the garden, with a power of fine folks."

"They shall not see me till I have made myself a little more decent," said the young beauty, who knew at bottom how little comparatively the color of her dress could affect her appearance, and she opened Mr. Vane's door and glided in.

Burdock's first determination was, in spite of her injunction, to tell Colander; but on reflection, he argued: "And then what will they do? They will put their heads together, and deceive us some other way. No!" thought James, with a touch of spite, "we shall see how they will all look." He argued also, that, at sight of his beautiful wife, his master must come to his senses, and the Colander faction be defeated; and, perhaps, by the mercy of Providence, Colander himself turned off.

Whilst thus ruminating, a thundering knock at the door almost knocked him off his legs. "There ye go again," said he, and went angrily to the door. This time it was Hunsdon, who was in a desperate hurry to see his master.

"Where is Sir Charles Pomander, my honest fellow?" said he.

"In the garden, my Jack-a-dandy!" said Burdock, furiously.

("Honest fellow," among servants, implies some moral inferiority.)

In the garden went Hunsdon. His master — all whose senses were playing sentinel — saw him, and left the company to meet him.

"She is in the house, sir."

"Good! Go — vanish!"

Sir Charles looked into the banquet-room; the haunch was being placed on the table. He returned with the information. He burned to bring husband and wife together; he counted each second lost that postponed this (to him) thrilling joy. Oh, how happy he was! happier than the serpent, when he saw Eve's white teeth really strike into the apple!

"Shall we pay respect to this haunch, Mr. Quin?" said Vane, gayly.

"If you please, sir," said Quin, gravely.

Colander ran down a by-path with an immense bouquet, which he arranged for Mrs. Woffington in a vase at Mr. Vane's left hand. He then threw open the windows, which were on the French plan, and shut within a foot of the lawn.

The musicians in the arbor struck up, and the company, led by Mr. Vane and Mrs. Woffington, entered the room. And a charming room it was! — light, lofty, and large — adorned in the French way with white and gold.

The table was an exact oval, and at it everybody could hear what any one said; an excellent arrangement where ideaed guests only are admitted — which is another excellent arrangement, though I see people don't think so.

The repast was luxurious and elegant. There was no profusion of unmeaning dishes; each was a *bonne-bouche* — an undeniable delicacy. The glass was beautiful, the plates silver; the flowers rose like walls from the table; the plate massive and glorious, rose-water in the hand-glasses; music crept in from the garden, deliciously subdued into what seemed a natural sound. A broad stream of southern sun gushed in fiery gold through the open window, and like a red-hot rainbow, danced through the stained glass above it. Existence was a thing to bask in — in such a place, and so happy an hour!

The guests were Quin, Mrs. Clive, Mr. Cibber, Sir Charles Pomander, Mrs. Woffington, and Messrs. Soaper and Snarl, critics of the day. This pair, with wonderful sagacity, had arrived from the street as the haunch came from the kitchen. Good humor reigned; some cuts passed, but as the parties professed wit, they gave and took.

Quin carved the haunch, and was happy; Soaper and Snarl eating the same, and drinking Toquay, were mellowed and mitigated into human flesh. Mr. Vane and Mrs. Woffington were happy; he, because his conscience was asleep; and she, because she felt nothing now could shake her hold of him. Sir Charles was in a sort of mental chuckle. His head burned, his bones ached; but he was in a sort of nervous delight.

"Where is she?" thought he. "What will she do? Will she send her maid with a note? How blue he will look! Or, will she come herself? She is a country wife; there must be a scene. Oh, why doesn't she come into this room? She must know we are here! Is she

watching somewhere?" His brain became puzzled, and his senses were sharpened to a point; he was all eye, ear and expectation; and this was why he was the only one to hear a very slight sound behind the door we have mentioned, and next to perceive a lady's glove lying close to that door. Mabel had dropped it in her retreat. Putting this and that together, he was led to hope and believe she was there, making her toilet perhaps, and her arrival at present unknown.

"Do you expect no one else?" said he, with feigned carelessness, to Mr. Vane.

"No," said Mr. Vane, with real carelessness.

"It must be so! What fortune!" thought Pomander.

Soaper. Mr. Cibber looks no older than he did five years ago.

Snarl. There was no room on his face for a fresh wrinkle.

Soaper. He! he! Nay, Mr. Snarl; Mr. Cibber is like old port: the more ancient he grows, the more delicious his perfume.

Snarl. And the crustier he gets.

Clive. Mr. Vane, you should always separate those two. Snarl, by himself, is just supportable, but when Soaper paves the way with his hypocritical praise, the pair are too much; they are a two-edged sword.

Woffington. Wanting nothing but polish and point.

Vane. Gentlemen, we abandon your neighbor, Mr. Quin, to you.

Quin. They know better. If they don't keep a civil tongue in their heads, no fat goes from here to them.

Cibber. Ah, Mr. Vane, this room is delightful; but it makes me sad. I knew this house in Lord Longueville's time; an unrivalled gallant, Peggy. You may just remember him, Sir Charles?

Pomander (with his eye on a certain door). Yes, yes; a gouty old fellow.

Cibber fired up. "I wish you may ever be like him. Oh, the beauty, the wit, the *petits-soupers* that used to be here! Longueville was a great creature, Mr. Vane. I have known him entertain a fine lady in this room, while her rival was fretting and fuming on the other side of that door."

"Ah, indeed!" said Sir Charles.

"More shame for him," said Mr. Vane.

Here was luck! Pomander seized this opportunity of turning the conversation to his object. With a malicious twinkle in his eye, he inquired of Mr. Cibber what made him fancy the house had lost its virtue in Mr. Vane's hands?

"Because," said Cibber, peevishly, "you all want the true *savoir faire* nowadays, because there is no *juste milieu*, young gentlemen. The young dogs of to-day are all either unprincipled heathen, like yourself, or Amadises, like our worthy host." The old gentleman's face and manners were like those of a patriarch, regretting the general decay of virtue, not the imaginary diminution of a single vice. He concluded with a sigh, that "the true *preux des dames* went out with the full periwig; stap my vitals!"

"A bit of fat, Mr. Cibber?" said Quin, whose jokes were not polished.

"Jemmy, thou art a brute," was the reply.

"You refuse, sir?" said Quin, sternly.

"No, sir!" said Cibber, with dignity; "I accept."

Pomander's eye was ever on the door.

"The old are so unjust to the young," said he. "You pretend that the Deluge washed away iniquity, and that a rake is a fossil. What," said he, leaning as it were on every word, "if I bet you a cool hundred, that Vane has a petticoat in that room, and that Mrs. Woffington shall unearth her?"

The malicious dog thought this was the surest way to effect a dramatic exposure; because, if Peggy found Mabel to all appearances concealed, Peggy would scold her, and betray herself.

"Pomander!" cried Vane, in great heat; then checking himself, he said coolly: "But you all know Pomander."

"None of you," replied that gentleman. "Bring a chair, sir," said he, authoritatively, to a servant; who, of course, obeyed.

Mrs. Clive looked at him and thought: "There is something in this!"

"It is for the lady," said he, coolly. Then leaning over the table, he said to Mrs. Woffington, with an impudent affectation of friendly understanding: "I ran her to earth in this house not ten minutes ago. Of course, I don't know who she is! But," smacking his lips, "a rustic Amaryllis, breathing all Maybuds and meadow-sweet."

"Have her out, Peggy!" shouted Cibber. "I know the run — there's the covert! Hark forward! Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Vane rose, and with a sternness that brought the old beau up with a run, he said: "Mr. Cibber, age and infirmity are privileged; but for you, Sir Charles" —

"Don't be angry," interposed Mrs. Woffington, whose terror was lest he should quarrel with so practised a swordsman. "Don't you see it is a jest! and, as might be expected from poor Sir Charles, a very sorry one."

"A jest!" said Vane, white with rage. "Let it go no farther, or it will be earnest!"

Mrs. Woffington placed her hand on his shoulder, and at that touch he instantly yielded, and sat down.

It was at this moment, when Sir Charles found him-

self for the present baffled — for he could no longer press his point, and search that room; when the attention of all was drawn to a dispute, which, for a moment, had looked like a quarrel; whilst Mrs. Woffington's hand still lingered, as only a woman's hand can linger in leaving the shoulder of the man she loves; it was at this moment, the door opened of its own accord, and a most beautiful woman stood, with a light step, upon the threshold!

Nobody's back was to her, except Mr. Vane's. Every eye, but his, was spell-bound upon her.

Mrs. Woffington withdrew her hand, as if a scorpion had touched her.

A stupor of astonishment fell on them all.

Mr. Vane, seeing the direction of all their eyes, slewed himself round in his chair into a most awkward position, and when he saw the lady, he was utterly dumfounded! But she, as soon as he turned his face her way, glided up to him with a half sigh, half cry of joy, and taking him round the neck, kissed him deliciously, while every eye at the table met every other eye in turn. One or two of the men rose; for the lady's beauty was as worthy of homage, as her appearing was marvellous.

Mrs. Woffington, too astonished for emotion to take any definite shape, said, in what seemed an ordinary tone: "Who is this lady?"

"I am his wife, madam," said Mabel, in the voice of a skylark, and smiling friendly on the questioner.

"It is my wife!" said Vane, like a speaking-machine; he was scarcely in a conscious state. "It is my wife!" he repeated, mechanically.

The words were no sooner out of Mabel's mouth than two servants, who had never heard of Mrs. Vane before, hastened to place on Mr. Vane's right hand the chair Pomander had provided, a plate and napkin were there

in a twinkling, and the wife modestly, but as a matter of course, courtesied low, with an air of welcome to all her guests, and then glided into the seat her servants obsequiously placed for her.

The whole thing did not take half a minute!

CHAPTER XI.

Mr. Vane, besides being a rich, was a magnificent man; when his features were in repose their beauty had a wise and stately character. Soaper and Snarl had admired, and bitterly envied him. At the present moment no one of his guests envied him — they began to realize his position. And he, a huge wheel of shame and remorse began to turn and whirr before his eyes. He sat between two European beauties, and pale and red by turns, shunned the eyes of both, and looked down at his plate in a cold sweat of humiliation, mortification, and shame.

The iron passed through Mrs. Woffington's soul. So! this was a villain too, the greatest villain of all — a hypocrite! She turned very faint, but she was under an enemy's eye, and under a rival's; the thought drove the blood back from her heart, and with a mighty effort she was Woffington again. Hitherto her *liaison* with Mr. Vane had called up the better part of her nature, and perhaps our reader has been taking her for a good woman; but now all her dregs were stirred to the surface. The mortified actress gulled by a novice, the wronged and insulted woman, had but two thoughts; to defeat her rival — to be revenged on her false lover. More than one sharp spasm passed over her features before she could master them, and then she became smiles above, wormwood and red-hot steel below — all in less than half a minute.

As for the others, looks of keen intelligence passed between them, and they watched with burning interest for the *dénoûment*. That interest was stronger than

their sense of the comicality of all this (for the humorous view of what passes before our eyes, comes upon cool reflection, not often at the time).

Sir Charles, indeed, who had foreseen some of this, wore a demure look, belied by his glittering eye. He offered Cibber snuff, and the two satirical animals grinned over the snuff-box, like a malicious old ape and a mischievous young monkey.

The new-comer was charming; she was above the middle height, of a full though graceful figure; her abundant, glossy, bright brown hair glittered here and there like gold in the light; she had a snowy brow, eyes of the profoundest blue, a cheek like a peach, and a face beaming candor and goodness; the character of her countenance resembled "the Queen of the May," in Mr. Leslie's famous picture, more than any face of our day I can call to mind.

"You are not angry with me for this silly trick?" said she, with some misgiving. "After all, I am only two hours before my time; you know, dearest, I said four in my letter — did I not?"

Vane stammered. What could he say?

"And you have had three days to prepare you, for I wrote, like a good wife, to ask leave before starting; but he never so much as answered my letter, madam." (This she addressed to Mrs. Woffington, who smiled by main force.)

"Why," stammered Vane, "could you doubt? I — I" —

"No! Silence was consent, was it not? But I beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you will forgive me. It is six months since I saw him — so you understand — I warrant me you did not look for me so soon, ladies?"

"Some of us did not look for you at all, madam," said Mrs. Woffington.

"What! Ernest did not tell you he expected me?"

"No! He told us this banquet was in honor of a lady's first visit to his house, but none of us imagined that lady to be his wife."

Vane began to writhe under that terrible tongue, whose point hitherto had ever been turned away from him.

"He intended to steal a march on us," said Pomander, dryly; "and with your help, we steal one on him;" and he smiled maliciously on Mrs. Woffington.

"But, madam," said Mr. Quin, "the moment you did arrive, I kept sacred for you a bit of the fat for which, I am sure, you must be ready. Pass her plate!"

"Not at present, Mr. Quin," said Mr. Vane, hastily. "She is about to retire and change her travelling dress."

"Yes, dear; but you forget, I am a stranger to your friends. Will you not introduce me to them first?"

"No, no!" cried Vane, in trepidation. "It is not usual to introduce in the *beau monde*."

"We always introduce ourselves," rejoined Mrs. Woffington; and she rose slowly, with her eye on Vane. He cast a look of abject entreaty on her; but there was no pity in that curling lip and awful eye. He closed his own eyes, and waited for the blow. Sir Charles threw himself back in his chair, and chuckling, prepared for the explosion. Mrs. Woffington saw him, and cast on him a look of ineffable scorn; and then she held the whole company fluttering a long while. At length: "The Honorable Mrs. Quickly, madam," said she, indicating Mrs. Clive.

This turn took them all by surprise. Pomander bit his lip.

"Sir John Brute" —

"Falstaff," cried Quin; "hang it."

"Sir John Brute Falstaff," resumed Mrs. Woffington. "We call him, for brevity, Brute."

Vane drew a long breath. "Your neighbor is Lord Foppington; a butterfly of some standing, and a little gouty."

"Sir Charles Pomander."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Vane. "It is the good gentleman who helped us out of the slough, near Huntingdon. Ernest, if it had not been for this gentleman, I should not have had the pleasure of being here now." And she beamed on the good Pomander.

Mr. Vane did not rise and embrace Sir Charles.

"All the company thanks the good Sir Charles," said Cibber, bowing.

"I see it in all their faces," said the good Sir Charles, dryly.

Mrs. Woffington continued: "Mr. Soaper, Mr. Snarl; gentlemen who would butter and slice up their own fathers!"

"Bless me!" cried Mrs. Vane, faintly.

"Critics!" And she dropped, as it were, the word dryly, with a sweet smile, into Mabel's plate.

Mrs. Vane was relieved; she had apprehended cannibals. London they had told her was full of curiosities.

"But yourself, madam?"

"I am the Lady Betty Modish; at your service."

A four-inch grin went round the table. The dramatical old rascal, Cibber, began now to look at it as a bit of genteel comedy; and slipped out his note-book under the table. Pomander cursed her ready wit, which had disappointed him of his catastrophe. Vane wrote on a slip of paper: "Pity and respect the innocent!" and passed it to Mrs. Woffington. He could not have done a more superfluous or injudicious thing.

"And now, Ernest," cried Mabel, "for the news from Willoughby."

Vane stopped her in dismay. He felt how many satiri-

cal eyes and ears were upon him and his wife. "Pray go and change your dress first, Mabel," cried he, fully determined that on her return she should not find the present party there.

Mrs. Vane cast an imploring look on Mrs. Woffington. "My things are not come," said she. "And, Lady Betty, I had so much to tell him, and to be sent away;" and the deep blue eyes began to fill.

Now, Mrs. Woffington was determined that this lady, who she saw was simple, should disgust her husband, by talking twaddle before a band of satirists. So she said warmly: "It is not fair on us. Pray, madam, your budget of country news. Clouted cream so seldom comes to London quite fresh."

"There, you see, Ernest," said the unsuspicious soul. "First you must know that Gray Gillian is turned out for a brood mare, so old George won't let me ride her; old servants are such tyrants, my lady. And my Barbary hen has laid two eggs; Heaven knows the trouble we had to bring her to it. And Dame Best, that is my husband's old nurse, Mrs. Quickly, has had soup and pudding from the Hall every day: and once she went so far as to say it wasn't altogether a bad pudding. She is not a very grateful woman, in a general way, poor thing! I made it with these hands."

Vane writhed.

"Happy pudding!" observed Mr. Cibber.

"Is this mockery, sir?" cried Vane, with a sudden burst of irritation.

"No, sir; it is gallantry," replied Cibber, with perfect coolness.

"Will you hear a little music in the garden?" said Vane to Mrs. Woffington, pooh-poohing his wife's news.

"Not till I hear the end of Dame Bess."

"Best, my lady."

"Dame Best interests *me*, Mr. Vane."

"Ay! and Ernest is very fond of her too, when he is at home. She is in her nice new cottage, dear; but she misses the draughts that were in her old one — they were like old friends. 'The only ones I have, I'm thinking,' said the dear cross old thing: and there stood I, on her floor, with a flannel petticoat in both hands, that I had made for her, and ruined my finger. Look else, my Lord Foppington?" She extended a hand the color of cream.

"Permit me, madam;" taking out his glasses, with which he inspected her finger; and gravely announced to the company: "The laceration is, in fact, discernible. May I be permitted, madam," added he, "to kiss this fair hand, which I should never have suspected of having ever made itself half so useful?"

"Ay, my lord!" said she, coloring slightly, "you shall, because you are so old; but I don't say for a young gentleman, unless it was the one that belongs to me; and he does not ask me."

"My dear Mabel; pray remember we are not at Willoughby."

"I see we are not, Ernest." And the dove-like eyes filled brimful; and all her innocent prattle was put an end to.

"What brutes men are," thought Mrs. Woffington. "They are not worthy even of a fool like this."

Mr. Vane once more pressed her to hear a little music in the garden; and this time she consented. Mr. Vane was far from being unmoved by his wife's arrival, and her true affection. But she worried him; he was anxious, above all things, to escape from his present position, and separate the rival queens; and this was the only way he could see to do it. He whispered Mabel, and bade her somewhat peremptorily rest herself for an hour after

her journey, and he entered the garden with Mrs. Woffington.

Now, the other gentlemen admired Mrs. Vane the most. She was new. She was as lovely, in her way, as Peggy; and it was the young May-born beauty of the country. They forgave her simplicity, and even her goodness, on account of her beauty; men are not severe judges of beautiful women. They all solicited her to come with them, and be the queen of the garden. But the good wife was obedient. Her lord had told her she was fatigued; so she said she was tired.

"Mr. Vane's garden will lack its sweetest and fairest flower, madam," cried Cibber, "if we leave you here."

"Nay, my lord, there are fairer than I."

"Poor Quin!" cried Kitty Clive; "to have to leave the alderman's walk for the garden-walk."

"All I regret," said the honest glutton, stoutly, "is that I go without carving for Mrs. Vane."

"You are very good, Sir John; I will be more troublesome to you at supper-time."

When they were all gone, she couldn't help sighing. It almost seemed as if everybody was kinder to her than he whose kindness alone she valued. "And he must take Lady Betty's hand instead of mine," thought she. "But that is good breeding, I suppose. I wish there was no such thing: we are very happy without it in Shropshire." Then this poor little soul was ashamed of herself, and took herself to task. "Poor Ernest," said she, pitying the wrong-doer, like a woman, "he was not pleased to be so taken by surprise. No wonder; they are so ceremonious in London. How good of him not to be angry!" Then she sighed; her heart had received a damp. His voice seemed changed, and he did not meet her eyes with the look he wore at Willoughby. She looked timidly into the garden. She saw the gay colors

of beaux, as well as of belles — for in these days broadcloth had not displaced silk and velvet — glancing and shining among the trees; and she sighed, but presently brightening up a little, she said: "I will go and see that the coffee is hot and clear, and the chocolate well mixed for them." The poor child wanted to do something to please her husband. Before she could carry out this act of domestic virtue, her attention was drawn to a strife of tongues in the hall. She opened the folding-doors, and there was a fine gentleman obstructing the entrance of a sombre rusty figure, with a portfolio and a manuscript under each arm.

The fine gentleman was Colander. The seedy personage was the eternal Triplet, come to make hay with his five-foot rule while the sun shone. Colander had opened the door to him, and he had shot into the hall. The major-domo obstructed the further entrance of such a coat.

"I tell you my master is not at home," remonstrated the major-domo.

"How can you say so," cried Mrs. Vane, in surprise, "when you know he is in the garden?"

"Simpleton!" thought Colander.

"Show the gentleman in."

"Gentleman!" muttered Colander.

Triplet thanked her for her condescension; he would wait for Mr. Vane in the hall. "I came by appointment, madam; this is the only excuse for the importunity you have just witnessed."

Hearing this, Mrs. Vane dismissed Colander to inform his master. Colander bowed loftily, and walked into the servants' hall without deigning to take the last proposition into consideration.

"Come in here, sir," said Mabel; "Mr. Vane will come as soon as he can leave his company." Triplet entered

in a series of obsequious jerks. "Sit down and rest you, sir." And Mrs. Vane seated herself at the table, and motioned with her white hand to Triplet to sit beside her.

Triplet bowed, and sat on the edge of a chair, and smirked and dropped his portfolio, and instantly begged Mrs. Vane's pardon; in taking it up, he let fall his manuscript, and was again confused; but in the middle of some superfluous and absurd excuse his eye fell on the haunch; it straightway dilated to an enormous size, and he became suddenly silent and absorbed in contemplation.

"You look sadly tired, sir."

"Why, yes, madam. It is a long way from Lambeth Walk, and it is passing hot, madam." He took his handkerchief out, and was about to wipe his brow, but returned it hastily to his pocket. "I beg your pardon, madam," said Triplet, whose ideas of breeding, though speculative, were severe, "I forgot myself."

Mabel looked at him, and colored, and slightly hesitated. At last, she said: "I'll be bound you came in such a hurry you forgot — you mustn't be angry with me — to have your dinner first?"

For Triplet looked like an absurd wolf — all benevolence and starvation.

"What divine intelligence!" thought Trip. "How strange, madam," cried he, "you have hit it! This accounts, at once, for a craving I feel. Now you remind me, I recollect carving for others, I did forget to remember myself. Not that I need have forgot it to-day, madam; but being used to forget it, I did not remember not to forget it to-day, madam, that was all." And the author of this intelligent account smiled very, very, very absurdly.

She poured him out a glass of wine. He rose and

SHE POURED HIM OUT A GLASS OF WINE.

bowed; but peremptorily refused it, with his tongue — his eye drank it.

"But you must," persisted this hospitable lady.

"But, madam, consider I am not entitled to — Nectar, as I am a man!"

The white hand was filling his plate with partridge pie; "But, madam, you don't consider how you overwhelm me with your — Ambrosia, as I am a poet!"

"I am sorry Mr. Vane should keep you waiting."

"By no means, madam; it is very fortunate — I mean it procures me the pleasure of — (here articulation became obstructed) your society, madam. Besides, the servants of the Muse are used to waiting. What we are not used to is (here the white hand filled his glass) being waited upon by Hebe and the Twelve Graces, whose health I have the honor" (deglutition) —

"A poet!" cried Mabel; "oh, I am so glad! Little did I ever think to see a living poet! Dear heart! I should not have known, if you had not told me. Sir, I love poetry!"

"It is in your face, madam." Triplet instantly whipped out his manuscript, put a plate on one corner of it, and a decanter on the other, and begged her opinion of this trifle, composed, said he, "in honor of a lady Mr. Vane entertains to-day."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Vane, and colored with pleasure. How ungrateful she had been! Here was an attention! — For, of course, she never doubted that the verses were in honor of her arrival.

"'Bright being'" —

sang out Triplet.

"Nay, sir," said Mabel; "I think I know the lady, and it would be hardly proper of me" —

"Oh! madam!" said Triplet solemnly; "strictly cor-

rect, madam!" And he spread his hand out over his bosom. "Strictly! — 'Blunderbuss' (my poetical name, madam) never stooped to the taste of the town.

"'Bright being, thou'" —

"But you must have another glass of wine first, and a slice of the haunch."

"With alacrity, madam." He laid in a fresh stock of provisions.

Strange it was, to see them side by side! *he*, a Don Quixote, with cordage instead of lines in his mahogany face, and clothes hanging upon him: *she*, smooth, duck-like, delicious, and bright as an opening rose fresh with dew!

She watched him kindly, archly, and demurely; and still plied him, country wise, with every mortal thing on the table.

But the poet was not a boa-constrictor, and even a boa-constrictor has an end. Hunger satisfied, his next strongest feeling, simple vanity, remained to be contented. As the last morsel went in out came: —

"'Bright being, thou whose ra—'"

"No! no!" said she, who fancied herself (and not without reason) the bright being. "Mr. Vane intended them for a surprise."

"As you please, madam;" and the disappointed bore sighed. "But you would have liked them, for the theme inspired me. The kindest, the most generous of women! Don't you agree with me, madam?"

Mabel Vane opened her eyes. "Hardly, sir," laughed she.

"If you knew her as I do."

"I ought to know her better, sir."

"Ay, indeed! Well, madam, now her kindness to me,

for instance — a poor devil like me. The expression, I trust, is not disagreeable to you, madam? If so, forgive me, and consider it withdrawn."

"La, sir! civility is so cheap, if you go to that."

"Civility, ma'am? Why, she has saved me from despair — from starvation, perhaps."

"Poor thing! Well, indeed, sir, you looked — you looked — what a shame! and you a poet."

"From an epitaph to an epic, madam."

At this moment a figure looked in upon them from the garden, but retreated unobserved. It was Sir Charles Pomander, who had slipped away, with the heartless and malicious intention of exposing the husband to the wife, and profiting by her indignation and despair. Seeing Triplet, he made an extemporaneous calculation that so infernal a chatterbox could not be ten minutes in her company without telling her everything, and this would serve his turn very well. He therefore postponed his purpose, and strolled away to a short distance.

Triplet justified the Baronet's opinion. Without any sort of sequency, he now informed Mrs. Vane that the benevolent lady was to sit to him for her portrait.

Here was a new attention of Ernest's. How good he was, and how wicked and ungrateful she!

"What! are you a painter too?" she inquired.

"From a house front to an historical composition, madam."

"Oh, what a clever man! And so Ernest commissioned you to paint a portrait?"

"No, madam; for that I am indebted to the lady herself."

"The lady herself?"

"Yes, madam; and I expected to find her here. Will you add to your kindness by informing me whether she has arrived? Or she is gone" —

"Who, sir? (Oh, dear! not my portrait! O Ernest!)"

"Who, madam?" cried Triplet; "why, Mrs. Woffington!"

"She is not here," said Mrs. Vane, who remembered all the names perfectly well. "There is one charming lady among our guests; her face took me in a moment; but she is a titled lady; there is no Mrs. Woffington amongst them."

"Strange," replied Triplet, "she was to be here; and, in fact, that is why I expedited these lines in her honor."

"In *her* honor, sir?"

"Yes, madam. Allow me:

"'Bright being, thou whose radiant brow'"—

"No! no! I don't care to hear them now, for I don't know the lady."

"Well, madam — but at least you have seen her act?"

"Act! you don't mean all this is for an actress?"

"*An* actress? *The* actress! And you have never seen her act? What a pleasure you have to come! To see her act is a privilege; but to act with her as *I* once did! But she does not remember that, nor shall I remind her, madam," said Triplet, sternly. "On that occasion I was hissed, owing to circumstances which, for the credit of our common nature, I suppress."

"What! are you an actor, too? You are everything."

"And it was in a farce of my own, madam, which, by the strangest combination of accidents, was damned!"

"A play-writer? Oh, what clever men there are in the world — in London, at least! He is a play-writer, too. I wonder my husband comes not. Does Mr. Vane — does Mr. Vane admire this actress?" said she, suddenly.

"Mr. Vane, madam, is a gentleman of taste," said he, pompously.

"Well, sir," said the lady, languidly, "she is not here." Triplet took the hint and rose. "Good-by," said she, sweetly; "and thank you kindly for your company, Mr. — Mr." —

"Triplet, madam — James Triplet, of 10 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth. Occasional verses, odes, epithalamia, elegies, dedications, squibs, impromptus, and hymns, executed with spirit, punctuality, and secrecy. Portraits painted, and instruction in declamation, sacred, profane, and dramatic. The card, madam (and he drew it as doth a theatrical fop his rapier), of him who, to all these qualifications, adds a prouder still — that of being,

"Madam,

"Your humble, devoted, and grateful servant,

"JAMES TRIPLET."

He bowed in a line from his right shoulder to his left toe, and moved off. But Triplet could not go all at one time out of such company; he was given to return in real life, he had played this trick so often on the stage. He came back, exuberant with gratitude.

"The fact is, madam," said he, "strange as it may appear to you, a kind hand has not so often been held out to me, that I should forget it, especially when that hand is so fair and gracious. May I be permitted, madam — you will impute it to gratitude, rather than audacity — I — I — (whimper) madam (with sudden severity), I am gone!"

These last words he pronounced with the right arm at an angle of forty-five degrees, and the fingers pointing horizontally. The stage had taught him this grace also. In his day an actor who had three words to say, such as, "My Lord's carriage is waiting," came on the stage with the right arm thus elevated, delivered his message in the tone of a falling dynasty, wheeled like a soldier, and

retired with the left arm pointing to the sky, and the right extended behind him like a setter's tail.

Left to herself, Mabel was uneasy. "Ernest is so warm-hearted." This was the way she put it even to herself. He admired her acting, and wished to pay her a compliment. "What if I carried him the verses?" She thought she should surely please him, by showing she was not the least jealous or doubtful of him. The poor child wanted so to win a kind look from her husband; but ere she could reach the window, Sir Charles Pomander had entered it.

Now, Sir Charles was naturally welcome to Mrs. Vane; for all she knew of him was, that he had helped her on the road to her husband.

Pomander. What, madam, all alone here as in Shropshire?

Mabel. For the moment, sir.

Pomander. Force of habit. A husband with a wife in Shropshire is so like a bachelor.

Mabel. Sir!

Pomander. And our excellent Ernest is such a favorite!

Mabel. No wonder, sir.

Pomander. Few can so pass from the larva state of country squire to the butterfly nature of beau.

Mabel. Yes (sadly), I find him changed.

Pomander. Changed! Transformed! He is now the prop of the "Cocoa Tree," the star of Ranelagh, the Lauzun of the green-room.

Mabel. The green-room! Where is that? You mean kindly, sir; but you make me unhappy.

Pomander. The green-room, my dear madam, is the bower where houris put off their wings, and goddesses become dowdies; where Lady Macbeth weeps over her lap-dog, dead from repletion; and Belvidera soothes her

broken heart with a dozen of oysters; in a word, it is the place where actors and actresses become men and women, and act their own parts with skill, instead of a poet's, clumsily.

Mabel. Actors! actresses! Does Mr. Vane frequent such —

Pomander. He has earned in six months a reputation many a fine gentleman would give his ears for. Not a scandalous journal his initials have not figured in. Not an actress of reputation gossip has not given him for a conquest.

"How dare you say this to me?" cried Mrs. Vane, with a sudden flash of indignation, and then the tears streamed over her lovely cheeks; and even a Pomander might have forborne to torture her so; but Sir Charles had no mercy.

"You would be sure to learn it," said he; "and with malicious additions. It is better to hear the truth from a friend."

"A friend? He is no friend to a house who calumniates the husband to the wife. Is it the part of a friend to distort dear Ernest's kindliness and gayety into ill morals; to pervert his love of poetry and plays into an unworthy attachment to actors and — oh!" and the tears would come. But she dried them, for now she hated this man; with all the little power of hatred she had, she detested him. "Do you suppose I did not know Mrs. Woffington was to come to us to-day?" cried she, struggling passionately against her own fears and Sir Charles's innuendoes.

"What!" cried he; "you recognized her? You detected the actress of all work under the airs of Lady Betty Modish?"

"Lady Betty Modish!" cried Mabel; "that good, beautiful face!"

"Ah!" cried Sir Charles, "I see you did not. Well, Lady Betty was Mrs. Woffington!"

"Whom my husband, I know, had invited here to present her with these verses, which I shall take him for her;" and her poor little lip trembled. "Had the visit been in any other character, as you are so base, so cruel as to insinuate (what have I done to you that you kill me so, you wicked gentleman?), would he have chosen the day of my arrival?"

"Not if he knew you were coming," was the cool reply.

"And he did know — I wrote to him."

"Indeed!" said Pomander, fairly puzzled.

Mrs. Vane caught sight of her handwriting on the tray and darted to it, and seized her letter, and said triumphantly, —

"My last letter, written upon the road — see!"

Sir Charles took it with surprise, but, turning it in his hand, a cool, satirical smile came to his face. He handed it back, and said coldly, —

"Read me the passage, madam, on which you argue."

Poor Mrs. Vane turned the letter in her hand, and her eye became instantly glazed: the seal was unbroken! She gave a sharp cry of agony, like a wounded deer. She saw Pomander no longer: she was alone with her great anguish. "I had but my husband and my God in the world," cried she. "My mother is gone. My God, have pity on me! my husband does not love me."

The cold villain was startled at the mighty storm his mean hand had raised. This creature had not only more feeling, but more passion, than a hundred libertines. He muttered some villain's commonplaces; while this unhappy young lady raised her hands to heaven, and sobbed in a way very terrible to any manly heart.

"He is unworthy you," muttered Pomander. "He

has forfeited your love: he has left you nothing but revenge. Be comforted. Let me, who have learned already to adore you" —

"So," cried she, turning on him in a moment (for on some points woman's instinct is the lightning of wisdom), "this, sir, was your object? I may no longer hold a place in my husband's heart, but I am mistress of his house. Leave it, sir, and never return to it whilst I live."

Sir Charles, again discomfited, bowed reverentially. "Your wish shall ever be respected by me, madam. But here they come. Use the right of a wife. Conceal yourself in that high chair. See, I turn it, so that they cannot see you. At least, you will find I have but told you the truth."

"No!" cried Mabel violently. "I will not spy upon my husband at the dictation of his treacherous friend."

Sir Charles vanished. He was no sooner gone than Mrs. Vane crouched, trembling and writhing with jealousy, in the large, high-backed chair. She heard her husband and the *soi-disant* Lady Betty Modish enter. During their absence Mrs. Woffington had doubtless been playing her cards with art, for it appeared that a reconciliation was now taking place. The lady, however, was still cool and distant. It was poor Mabel's fate to hear these words: "You must permit me to go alone, Mr. Vane. I insist upon leaving this house alone."

On this he whispered to her.

She answered, "You are not justified."

"I can explain all," was his reply. "I am ready to renounce credit, character, all the world for you."

They passed out of the room before the unhappy listener could recover the numbing influence of these deadly words.

But the next moment she started wildly up, and cried

as one drowning cries vaguely for help, "Ernest! oh, no — no! you cannot use me so! Ernest — husband! O mother! mother!"

She rose, and would have made for the door, but nature had been too cruelly tried. At the first step she could no longer see anything; and the next moment swooning dead away, she fell back insensible, with her head and shoulders resting on the chair.

CHAPTER XII.

Mr. Vane was putting Mrs. Woffington into her chair, when he thought he heard his name cried. He bade that lady a mournful farewell, and stepped back into his own hall. He had no sooner done so, than he heard a voice, the accent of which alarmed him, though he distinguished no word. He hastily crossed the hall, and flew into the banquet-room. Coming rapidly in at the folding-doors, he almost fell over his wife, lying insensible, half upon the floor, and half upon the chair. When he saw her pale and motionless, a terrible misgiving seized him: he fell on his knees.

"Mabel, Mabel!" cried he, "my love! my innocent wife! O God! what have I done? Perhaps it is the fatigue: perhaps she has fainted."

"No, it is not the fatigue!" screamed a voice near him. It was old James Burdock, who, with his white hair streaming, and his eye gleaming with fire, shook his fist in his master's face. "No, it is not the fatigue, you villain! It is you who have killed her, with your Jezebels and harlots, you scoundrel!"

"Send the women here, James, for God's sake!" cried Mr. Vane, not even noticing the insult he had received from a servant. He stamped furiously, and cried for help. The whole household was round her in a moment. They carried her to bed.

The remorse-stricken man, his own knees trembling under him, flew, in an agony of fear and self-reproach, for a doctor.

A doctor?

CHAPTER XIII.

During the garden scene Mr. Vane had begged Mrs. Woffington to let him accompany her. She peremptotily refused, and said in the same breath she was going to Triplet, in Hercules Buildings, to have her portrait finished.

Had Mr. Vane understood the sex, he would not have interpreted her refusal to the letter, when there was a postscript, the meaning of which was so little enigmatical.

Some three hours after the scene we have described, Mrs. Woffington sat in Triplet's apartment; and Triplet, palette in hand, painted away upon her portrait.

Mrs. Woffington was in that languid state which comes to women after their hearts have received a blow. She felt as if life was ended, and but the dregs of existence remained; but at times a flood of bitterness rolled over her, and she resigned all hope of perfect happiness in this world, all hope of loving and respecting the same creature; and at these moments she had but one idea, — to use her own power, and bind her lover to her by chains never to be broken, and to close her eyes, and glide down the precipice of the future.

"I think you are master of this art," said she very languidly to Triplet, "you paint so rapidly."

"Yes, madam," said Triplet gloomily, and painted on. "Confound this shadow!" added he; and painted on.

His soul, too, was clouded. Mrs. Woffington, yawning in his face, had told him she had invited all Mr. Vane's company to come and praise his work; and ever since that he had been *morne et silencieux.*

"You are fortunate," continued Mrs. Woffington, not caring what she said, "it is so difficult to make execution keep pace with conception."

"Yes, ma'am;" and he painted on.

"You are satisfied with it?"

"Anything but, ma'am;" and he painted on.

"Cheerful soul! — then I presume it is like?"

"Not a bit, ma'am;" and he painted on.

Mrs. Woffington stretched.

"You can't yawn, ma'am — you can't yawn."

"Oh, yes, I can. You are such good company," and she stretched again.

"I was just about to catch the turn of the lip," remonstrated Triplet.

"Well, catch it — it won't run away."

"I'll try, ma'am. A pleasant half-hour it will be for me, when they all come here like cits at a shilling ordinary — each for his cut."

"At a sensitive goose!"

"That is as may be, madam. Those critics flay us alive."

"You should not hold so many doors open to censure."

"No, ma'am. Head a little more that way. I suppose you *can't* sit quiet, ma'am? — then never mind! (This resignation was intended as a stinging reproach.) Mr. Cibber, with his sneering snuff-box! Mr. Quin, with his humorous bludgeon! Mrs. Clive, with her tongue! Mr. Snarl, with his abuse! And Mr. Soaper, with his praise! — arsenic in treacle I call it. But there, I deserve it all. For look on this picture, and on this."

"Meaning, I am painted as well as my picture."

"Oh, no, no, no! But to turn from your face, madam, — on which the lightning of expression plays continually, — to this stony, detestable, dead daub! I could — and I will, too! Imposture! dead caricature of life and beauty,

take that!" and he dashed his palette-knife through the canvas. "Libellous lie against nature and Mrs. Woffington, take that!" and he stabbed the canvas again; then, with sudden humility: "I beg your pardon, ma'am," said he, "for this apparent outrage, which I trust you will set down to the excitement attendant upon failure. The fact is, I am an incapable ass, and no painter. Others have often hinted as much; but I never observed it myself till now."

"Right through my pet dimple," said Mrs. Woffington, with perfect *nonchalance*. "Well, now I suppose I may yawn, or do what I like?"

"You may, madam," said Triplet, gravely. "I have forfeited what little control I had over you, madam."

So they sat opposite each other, in mournful silence. At length, the actress suddenly rose. She struggled fiercely against her depression, and vowed that melancholy should not benumb her spirits and her power.

"He ought to have been here by this time," said she to herself. "Well, I will not mope for him; I must do something. Triplet," said she.

"Madam."

"Nothing."

"No, madam."

She sat gently down again, and leaned her head on her hand, and thought. She was beautiful as she thought; her body seemed bristling with mind. At last her thoughtful gravity was illumined by a smile: she had thought out something *excogitaverat*.

"Triplet, the picture is quite ruined!"

"Yes, ma'am. And a coach-load of criticism coming."

"Triplet, we actors and actresses have often bright ideas."

"Yes, ma'am."

"When we take other people's."

"He, he!" went Triplet. "Those are our best, madam."

"Well, sir, I have got a bright idea."

"You don't say so, ma'am!"

"Don't be a brute, dear," said the lady, gravely.

Triplet stared.

"When I was in France, taking lessons of Dumesnil, one of the actors of the Théâtre Français had his portrait painted by a rising artist. The others were to come and see it. They determined beforehand to mortify the painter and the sitter by abusing the work in good set terms. But somehow this got wind, and the patients resolved to be the physicians. They put their heads together, and contrived that the living face should be in the canvas, surrounded by the accessories: these, of course, were painted. Enter the actors, who played their little pre-arranged farce; and when they had each given the picture a slap, the picture rose and laughed in their faces, and discomfited them. By the by, the painter did not stop there; he was not content with a short laugh, he laughed at them five hundred years."

"Good gracious, Mrs. Woffington!"

"He painted a picture of the whole thing; and as his work is immortal, ours an April snow-flake, he has got tremendously the better of those rash little satirists. Well, Trip, what is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose, so give me the sharpest knife in the house."

Triplet gave her a knife, and looked confused, while she cut away the face of the picture, and by dint of scraping, cutting, and measuring, got her face two parts through the canvas. She then made him take his brush and paint all round her face, so that the transition might not be too abrupt. Several yards of green baize were also produced. This was to be disposed behind the easel, so as to conceal her.

Triplet painted here, and touched and retouched there.

Whilst thus occupied, he said, in his calm resigned way, "It won't do, madam. I suppose you know that?"

"I know nothing," was the reply. "Life is a guess. I don't think we could deceive Roxalana and Lucy this way, because their eyes are without colored spectacles; but when people have once begun to see by prejudices and judge by jargon, what can't be done with them? Who knows? do you? I don't, so let us try."

"I beg your pardon, madam, my brush touched your face."

"No offence, sir; I am used to that. And I beg, if you can't tone the rest of the picture up to me, that you will instantly tone me down to the rest. Let us be in tune, whatever it costs, sir."

"I will avail myself of the privilege, madam, but sparingly. Failure, which is certain, madam, will cover us with disgrace."

"Nothing is certain in this life, sir, except that you are a goose. It succeeded in France; and England can match all Europe for fools; besides, it will be well done. They say Davy Garrick can turn his eyes into bottled gooseberries. Well, Peg Woffington will turn hers into black currants. Haven't you done? I wonder they have not come. Make haste!"

"They will know by its beauty I never did it."

"That is a sensible remark, Trip. But I think they will rather argue backwards; that as you did it, it cannot be beautiful, and so cannot be me. Your reputation will be our shield."

"Well, madam, now you mention it, they are like enough to take that ground. They despise all I do: if they did not" —

"You would despise them."

At this moment the pair were startled by the sound of a coach. Triplet turned as pale as ashes. Mrs. Woffing-

ton had her misgivings; but not choosing to increase the difficulty, she would not let Triplet, whose self-possession she doubted, see any sign of emotion in her.

"Lock the door," said she, firmly, "and don't be silly. Now hold up my green baize petticoat, and let me be in a half-light. Now put that table and those chairs before me, so that they can't come right up to me; and, Triplet, don't let them come within six yards, if you can help it. Say it is unfinished, and so must be seen from a focus."

"A focus! I don't know what you mean."

"No more do I; no more will they, perhaps; and if they don't, they will swallow it directly. Unlock the door; are they coming?"

"They are only at the first stair."

"Mr. Triplet, your face is a book, where one may read strange matters. For Heaven's sake, compose yourself; let all the risk lie in one countenance. Look at me, sir. Make your face like the Book of Daniel in a Jew's back parlor. Volto Sciolto is your cue."

"Madam, madam, how your tongue goes! I hear them on the stairs; pray don't speak!"

"Do you know what we are going to do?" continued the tormenting Peggy. "We are going to weigh goose's feathers! to criticise criticism, Trip" —

"Hush, hush!"

A grampus was heard outside the door, and Triplet opened it. There was Quin leading the band.

"Have a care, sir," cried Triplet; "there is a hiatus the third step from the door."

"A *gradus ad Parnassum* a-wanting," said Mr. Cibber.

Triplet's heart sank. The hole had been there six months, and he had found nothing witty to say about it, and at first sight Mr. Cibber had done its business. And on such men he and his portrait were to attempt a preposterous delusion. Then there was Snarl, who wrote

critiques on painting, and guided the national taste. The unlucky exhibitor was in a cold sweat. He led the way like a thief going to the gallows.

"The picture being unfinished, gentlemen," said he, "must, if you would do me justice, be seen from a — a focus: must be judged from here, I mean."

"Where, sir?" said Mr. Cibber.

"About here, sir, if you please," said poor Triplet faintly.

"It looks like a finished picture from here," said Mrs. Clive.

"Yes, madam," groaned Triplet.

They all took up a position, and Triplet timidly raised his eyes along with the rest: he was a little surprised. The actress had flattened her face! She had done all that could be done, and more than he had conceived possible, in the way of extracting life and the atmosphere of expression from her countenance. She was "dead still!"

There was a pause.

Triplet fluttered. At last some of them spoke as follows:

Soaper. Ah!

Quin. Ho!

Clive. Eh!

Cibber. Humph!

These interjections are small on paper, but as the good creatures uttered them they were eloquent; there was a cheerful variety of dispraise skilfully thrown into each of them.

"Well," continued Soaper, with his everlasting smile.

Then the fun began.

"May I be permitted to ask whose portrait this is?" said Mr. Cibber slyly.

"I distinctly told you, it was to be Peg Woffing-

ton's," said Mrs. Clive. "I think you might take my word."

"Do you act as truly as you paint?" said Quin.

"Your fame runs no risk from me, sir," replied Triplet.

"It is not like Peggy's beauty! Eh?" rejoined Quin.

"I can't agree with you," cried Kitty Clive. "I think it a very pretty face; and not at all like Peg Woffington's."

"Compare paint with paint," said Quin. "Are you sure you ever saw down to Peggy's real face?"

Triplet had seen with alarm, that Mr. Snarl spoke not; many satirical expressions crossed his face, but he said nothing. Triplet gathered from this, that he had at once detected the trick. "Ah!" thought Triplet, "he means to quiz them, as well as expose me. He is hanging back; and, in point of fact, a mighty satirist like Snarl would naturally choose to quiz six people rather than two."

"Now, I call it beautiful," said the traitor Soaper. "So calm and reposeful; no particular expression."

"None whatever," said Snarl.

"Gentlemen," said Triplet, "does it never occur to you, that the fine arts are tender violets, and cannot blow when the north winds" —

"Blow!" inserted Quin.

"Are so cursed cutting?" continued Triplet.

"My good sir, I am never cutting," smirked Soaper. "My dear Snarl," whined he, "give us the benefit of your practised judgment. Do justice to this ad-mirable work of art," drawled the traitor.

"I will!" said Mr. Snarl, and placed himself before the picture.

"What on earth will he say?" thought Triplet. "I can see by his face, he has found us out."

Mr. Snarl delivered a short critique. Mr. Snarl's intelligence was not confined to his phrases; all critics use intelligent phrases and philosophical truths. But this gentleman's manner was very intelligent; it was pleasant, quiet, assured, and very convincing. Had the reader or I been there, he would have carried us with him, as he did his hearers; and as his successors carry the public with them now.

"Your brush is by no means destitute of talent, Mr. Triplet," said Mr. Snarl. "But you are somewhat deficient, at present, in the great principles of your art; the first of which is a loyal adherence to truth. Beauty itself is but one of the forms of truth, and nature is our finite exponent of infinite truth."

His auditors gave him a marked attention. They could not but acknowledge, that men who go to the bottom of things like this should be the best instructors.

"Now, in nature, a woman's face at this distance — ay, even at this short distance — melts into the air. There is none of that sharpness; but, on the contrary, a softness of outline." He made a lorgnette of his two hands; the others did so too, and found they saw much better — oh, ever so much better! "Whereas, yours," resumed Snarl, "is hard; and, forgive me, rather tea-board like. Then your *chiaro-scuro*, my good sir, is very defective; for instance, in nature, the nose intercepting the light on one side the face, throws, of necessity, a shadow under the eye. Caravaggio, Venetians generally, and the Bolognese masters, do particular justice to this. No such shade appears in this portrait."

"'Tis so, stop my vitals!" observed Colley Cibber. And they all looked, and having looked, wagged their heads in assent — as the fat, white lords at Christie's waggle fifty pounds more out for a copy of Rembrandt,

a brown levitical Dutchman, visible in the pitch-dark by some sleight of sun Newton had not wit to discover.

Soaper dissented from the mass.

"But, my dear Snarl, if there are no shades, there are lights, loads of lights."

"There are," replied Snarl; "only they are impossible, that is all. You have, however," concluded he, with a manner slightly supercilious, "succeeded in the mechanical parts: the hair and the dress are well, Mr. Triplet; but your Woffington is not a woman, nor nature."

They all nodded and waggled assent; but this sagacious motion was arrested as by an earthquake.

The picture rang out, in the voice of a clarion, an answer that outlived the speaker: "She's a woman, for she has taken four men in! She's nature, for a fluent dunce doesn't know her when he sees her!"

Imagine the tableau! It was charming! Such opening of eyes and mouths! Cibber fell by second nature into an attitude of the old comedy. And all were rooted where they stood, with surprise and incipient mortification, except Quin, who slapped his knee, and took the trick at its value.

Peg Woffington slipped out of the green baize, and coming round from the back of the late picture, stood in person before them; while they looked alternately at her and at the hole in the canvas. She then came at each of them in turn, *more dramatico.*

"A pretty face, and not like Woffington. I owe you two, Kate Clive."

"Who ever saw Peggy's real face? Look at it now, if you can, without blushing, Mr. Quin."

Quin, a good-humored fellow, took the wisest view of his predicament, and burst into a hearty laugh.

"For all this," said Mr. Snarl peevishly, "I maintain, upon the unalterable principles of art" — At this they

all burst into a roar, not sorry to shift the ridicule. "Goths!" cried Snarl fiercely. "Good-morning, ladies and gentlemen," cried Mr. Snarl, *avec intention*, "I have a criticism to write of last night's performance." The laugh died away to a quaver. "I shall sit on your pictures one day, Mr. Brush."

"Don't sit on them with your head downwards, or you'll addle them," said Mr. Brush, fiercely. This was the first time Triplet had ever answered a foe. Mrs. Woffington gave him an eloquent glance of encouragement. He nodded his head in infantine exultation at what he had done.

"Come, Soaper," said Mr. Snarl.

Mr. Soaper lingered one moment to say: "You shall always have my good word, Mr. Triplet."

"I will try — and not deserve it, Mr. Soaper," was the prompt reply.

"Serve 'em right," said Mr. Cibber, as soon as the door had closed upon them, "for a couple of serpents, or rather one boa-constrictor. Soaper slavers, for Snarl to crush. But we were all a little too hard on Triplet here; and if he will accept my apology" —

"Why, sir," said Triplet, half trembling, but driven on by looks from Mrs. Woffington, "'Cibber's Apology' is found to be a trifle wearisome."

"Confound his impertinence!" cried the astounded Laureate. "Come along, Jemmy."

"Oh, sir!" said Quin, good humoredly, "we must give a joke and take a joke. And when he paints my portrait — which he shall do" —

"The bear from Hockley Hole shall sit for the head!"

"Curse his impudence!" roared Quin. "I'm at your service, Mr. Cibber," added he, in huge dudgeon.

Away went the two old boys.

"Mighty well!" said waspish Mrs. Clive. "I did

intend you should have painted Mrs. Clive. But after this impertinence" —

"You will continue to do it yourself, ma'am!"

This was Triplet's hour of triumph. His exultation was undignified, and such as is said to precede a fall. He inquired gravely of Mrs. Woffington, whether he had or had not shown a spirit? Whether he had or had not fired into each a parting shot, as they sheered off? To repair which, it might be advisable for them to put into friendly ports.

"Tremendous!" was the reply. "And when Snarl and Soaper sit on your next play, they won't forget the lesson you have given them."

"I'll be sworn they won't!" chuckled Triplet. But reconsidering her words, he looked blank, and muttered: "Then, perhaps, it would have been more prudent to let them alone!"

"Incalculably more prudent!" was the reply.

"Then, why did you set me on, madam?" said Triplet, reproachfully.

"Because I wanted amusement, and my head ached," was the cool answer, somewhat languidly given.

"I defy the coxcombs!" cried Triplet, with reviving spirit. "But real criticism I respect, honor, and bow to. Such as yours, madam; or such as that sweet lady's at Mr. Vane's would have been; or, in fact, anybody's who appreciates me. O madam! I wanted to ask you, was it not strange your not being at Mr. Vane's, after all, to-day?"

"I was at Mr. Vane's, Triplet."

"You were? Why, I came with my verses, and she said you were not there! I will go fetch the verses."

"No, no! Who said I was not there?"

"Did I not tell you? The charming young lady who helped me with her own hand to everything on the table. What wine that gentleman possesses!"

"Was it a young lady, Triplet?"

"Not more than two-and-twenty, I should say."

"In a travelling-dress?"

"I could not see her dress, madam, for her beauty — brown hair, blue eyes, charming in conversation" —

"Ah! What did she tell you?"

"She told me, madam — ahem!"

"Well, what did you tell her? and what did she answer?"

"I told her that I came with verses for you, ordered by Mr. Vane. That he admired you. I descanted, madam, on your virtues, which had made him your slave."

"Go on," said Mrs. Woffington, encouraging him with a deceitful smile. "Tell me all you told her."

"That you were sitting to me for your portrait, the destination of which was not doubtful. That I lived at 10 Hercules Buildings."

"You told that lady all this?"

"I give you my honor. She was so kind, I opened my heart to her. But tell me now, madam," said Triplet, joyously dancing round the Woffington volcano, "do you know this charming lady?"

"Yes."

"I congratulate you, madam. An acquaintance worthy even of you; and there are not many such. Who is she, madam?" continued Triplet, lively with curiosity.

"Mrs. Vane," was the quiet, grim answer.

"Mrs. Vane? His mother? No — am I mad? His sister! Oh! I see, his" —

"His wife!"

"His wife! Why, then Mr. Vane's married?"

"Yes."

"Oh, look there! — oh, look here now! Well, but, good heavens! she wasn't to know you were there, perhaps?"

"No."

"But then, I let the cat out of the bag?"

"Yes."

"But, good gracious! there will be some serious mischief!"

"No doubt of it."

"And it is all my fault?"

"Yes."

"I've played the deuce with their married happiness?"

"Probably."

"And, ten to one, if you are not incensed against me, too?"

Mrs. Woffington replied by looking him in the face, and turning her back upon him. She walked hastily to the window, threw it open, and looked out of it, leaving poor Triplet to very unpleasant reflections. She was so angry with him, she dared not trust herself to speak.

"Just my luck," thought he. "I had a patron and a benefactress — I have betrayed them both." Suddenly an idea struck him: "Madam," said he, timorously, "see what these fine gentlemen are! What business had he, with a wife at home, to come and fall in love with you? I do it forever in my plays — I am obliged — they would be so dull else; but in *real* life to do it is abominable."

"You forget, sir," replied Mrs. Woffington, without moving, "that I am an actress — a plaything for the impertinence of puppies and the treachery of hypocrites. Fool! to think there was an honest man in the world, and that he had shone on me!"

With these words she turned, and Triplet was shocked to see the change in her face. She was pale, and her black, lowering brows were gloomy and terrible. She walked like a tigress to and fro, and Triplet dared not speak to her: indeed, she seemed but half conscious of his presence. He went for nobody with her. How

little we know the people we eat, and go to church, and flirt with! Triplet had imagined this creature an incarnation of gayety, a sportive being, the daughter of smiles, the bride of mirth; needed but a look at her now to see that her heart was a volcano, her bosom a boiling gulf of fiery lava. She walked like some wild creature; she flung her hands up to heaven with a passionate despair, before which the feeble spirit of her companion shrank and cowered; and with quivering lips and blazing eyes, she burst into a torrent of passionate bitterness:

"But who is Margaret Woffington," she cried, "that she should pretend to honest love, or feel insulted by the proffer of a stolen regard? And what have we to do with homes, or hearts, or firesides? Have we not the play-house, its paste diamonds, its paste feelings, and the loud applause of fops and sots — hearts? — beneath loads of tinsel and paint? Nonsense! The love that can go with souls to heaven — such love for us? Nonsense! These men applaud us, cajole us, swear to us, flatter us; and yet, forsooth, we would have them respect us, too."

"My dear benefactress," said Triplet, "they are not worthy of you."

"I thought this man was not all dross; from the first I never felt his passion an insult. O Triplet! I could have loved this man — really loved him! and I longed so to be good. O God! O God!"

"Thank Heaven, you don't love him!" cried Triplet, hastily. "Thank Heaven for that!"

"Love him? Love a man who comes to me with a silly second-hand affection from his insipid baby-face, and offers me half, or two-thirds, or a third of his worthless heart? I hate him! — and her! — and all the world!"

"That is what I call a very proper feeling," said poor

Triplet, with a weak attempt to soothe her. "Then break with him at once, and all will be well."

"Break with him? Are you mad? No! Since he plays with the tools of my trade I shall fool him worse than he has me. I will feed his passion full, tempt him, torture him, play with him, as the angler plays a fish upon his hook. And when his very life depends on me, then by degrees he shall see me cool, and cool, and freeze into bitter aversion. Then he shall rue the hour he fought with the devil against my soul, and played false with a brain and heart like mine!"

"But his poor wife? You will have pity on her?"

"His wife! Are wives' hearts the only hearts that throb, and burn, and break? His wife must defend herself. It is not from me that mercy can come to her, nor from her to me. I loathe her, and I shall not forget that you took her part. Only if you are her friend, take my advice, don't you assist her. I shall defeat her without that. Let her fight *her* battle, and *I* mine."

"Ah, madam! she cannot fight, she is a dove."

"You are a fool! What do you know about women? You were with her five minutes, and she turned you inside out. My life on it, whilst I have been fooling my time here, she is in the field, with all the arts of our sex, simplicity at the head of them."

Triplet was making a futile endeavor to convert her to his view of her rival, when a knock suddenly came to his door. A slovenly girl, one of his own neighbors, brought him a bit of paper, with a line written in pencil.

"'Tis from a lady who waits below," said the girl.

Mrs. Woffington went again to the window, and there she saw getting out of a coach, and attended by James Burdock, Mabel Vane, who had sent up her name on the back of an old letter.

"What shall I do?" said Triplet, as soon as he recov-

ered the first stunning effects of this *contretemps*. To his astonishment, Mrs. Woffington bade the girl show the lady up-stairs. The girl went down on this errand.

"But *you* are here," remonstrated Triplet. "Oh! to be sure, you can go into the other room. There is plenty of time to avoid her," said Triplet, in a very natural tremor. "This way, madam!"

Mrs. Woffington stood in the middle of the room like a statue.

"What does she come here for?" said she, sternly. "You have not told me all."

"I don't know," cried poor Triplet, in dismay, "and I think the devil brings her here to confound me. For Heaven's sake, retire! What will become of us all? There will be murder, I know there will!"

To his horror, Mrs. Woffington would not move. "You are on her side," said she, slowly, with a concentration of spite and suspicion. She looked frightful at this moment. "All the better for me," added she, with a world of female malignity.

Triplet could not make head against this blow; he gasped and pointed piteously to the inner door. "No; I will know two things; the course she means to take, and the terms you two are upon."

By this time Mrs. Vane's light foot was heard on the stair, and Triplet sank into a chair. "They will tear one another to pieces," said he.

A tap came to the door.

He looked fearfully round, for the woman whom jealousy had so speedily turned from an angel to a fiend; and saw with dismay, that she had actually had the hardihood to slip round and enter the picture again. She had not quite arranged herself when her rival knocked.

Triplet dragged himself to the door. Before he

opened it, he looked fearfully over his shoulder, and received a glance of cool, bitter, deadly hostility, that boded ill both for him and his visitor. Triplet's apprehensions were not unreasonable. His benefactress and this sweet lady were rivals!

Jealousy is a dreadful passion, it makes us tigers. The jealous always thirst for blood. At any moment, when reason is a little weaker than usual, they are ready to kill the thing they hate, or the thing they love.

Any open collision between these ladies would scatter ill consequences all round. Under such circumstances, we are pretty sure to say or do something wicked, silly, or unreasonable. But what tortured Triplet more than anything was his own particular notion, that fate doomed him to witness a formal encounter between these two women; and of course an encounter of such a nature, as we in our day illustrate by "Kilkenny cats."

To be sure Mrs. Vane had appeared a dove, but doves can peck on certain occasions, and no doubt she had a spirit at bottom. Her coming to him proved it. And had not the other been a dove all the morning and afternoon? Yet jealousy had turned her to a fiend before his eyes. Then if (which was not probable) no collision took place, what a situation was his? Mrs. Woffington (his buckler from starvation) suspected him, and would distort every word that came from Mrs. Vane's lips.

Triplet's situation was, in fact, that of Æneas in the storm.

"Olim et hac meminisse juvabit"—
"But while present, such things don't please any one a bit."

It was the sort of situation we can laugh at, and see the fun of it six months after, if not shipwrecked on it at the time.

With a ghastly smile the poor quaking hypocrite wel-

comed Mrs. Vane, and professed a world of innocent delight, that she had so honored his humble roof.

She interrupted his compliments, and begged him to see whether she was followed by a gentleman in a cloak.

Triplet looked out of the window.

"Sir Charles Pomander!" gasped he.

Sir Charles was at the very door. If, however, he had intended to mount the stairs he changed his mind, for he suddenly went off round the corner with a business-like air, real or fictitious.

"He is gone, madam," said Triplet.

Mrs. Vane, the better to escape detection or observation, wore a thick mantle and a hood, that concealed her features. Of these Triplet debarrassed her.

"Sit down, madam," and he hastily drew a chair, so that her back was to the picture.

She was pale, and trembled a little. She hid her face in her hands a moment, then recovering her courage, "she begged Mr. Triplet to pardon her for coming to him. He had inspired her with confidence," she said; "he had offered her his services, and so she had come to him, for she had no other friend to aid her in her sore distress." She might have added, that with the tact of her sex she had read Triplet to the bottom, and came to him, as she would to a benevolent muscular old woman.

Triplet's natural impulse was to repeat most warmly his offers of service. He did so; and then conscious of the picture had a misgiving.

"Dear Mr. Triplet," began Mrs. Vane, "you know this person, Mrs. Woffington?"

"Yes, madam," replied Triplet, lowering his eyes, "I am honored by her acquaintance."

"You will take me to the theatre where she acts?"

"Yes, madam: to the boxes, I presume?"

"No! oh, no! How could I bear that? To the place where the actors and actresses are."

Triplet demurred. This would be courting that very collision, the dread of which even now oppressed him.

At the first faint sign of resistance she began to supplicate him, as if he was some great stern tyrant.

"Oh, you must not, you cannot refuse me. You do not know what I risk to obtain this. I have risen from my bed to come to you. I have a fire here!" She pressed her hand to her brow. "Oh, take me to her!"

"Madam, I will do anything for you. But be advised; trust to my knowledge of human nature. What you require is madness. Gracious Heavens! you two are rivals, and when rivals meet there's murder or deadly mischief."

"Ah! if you knew my sorrow, you would not thwart me. O Mr. Triplet! little did I think you were as cruel as the rest." So then this cruel monster whimpered out, that he should do any folly she insisted upon. "Good, kind Mr. Triplet!" said Mrs. Vane. "Let me look in your face? Yes, I see you are honest and true. I will tell you all." Then she poured in his ear her simple tale, unadorned and touching as Judah's speech to Joseph. She told him how she loved her husband; how he had loved her; how happy they were for the first six months; how her heart sank when he left her; how he had promised she should join him, and on that hope she lived. "But for two months he had ceased to speak of this, and I grew heart-sick waiting for the summons that never came. At last I felt I should die if I did not see him; so I plucked up courage and wrote that I must come to him. He did not forbid me, so I left our country home. Oh, sir! I cannot make you know how my heart burned to be by his side. I counted the hours of the journey; I counted the miles. At last I reached his house; I found a gay company there. I was a little sorry, but I said, 'His friends shall be welcome.

right welcome. He has asked them to welcome his wife.'"

"Poor thing!" muttered Triplet.

"O Mr. Triplet! they were there to do honor to — And the wife was neither expected nor desired. There lay my letters with their seals unbroken. I know all *his* letters by heart, Mr. Triplet. The seals unbroken — unbroken! Mr. Triplet."

"It is abominable!" cried Triplet, fiercely.

"And she who sat in my seat — in his house, and in his heart — was this lady, the actress you so praised to me?"

"That lady, ma'am," said Triplet, "has been deceived as well as you."

"I am convinced of it," said Mabel.

"And it is my painful duty to tell you, madam, that with all her talents and sweetness, she has a fiery temper; yes, a very fiery temper," continued Triplet, stoutly, though with an uneasy glance in a certain direction; "and I have reason to believe she is angry, and thinks more of her own ill-usage than yours. Don't you go near her. Trust to my knowledge of the sex, madam; I am a dramatic writer. Did you ever read the 'Rival Queens'?"

"No."

"I thought not. Well, madam, one stabs the other, and the one that is stabbed says things to the other that are more biting than steel. The prudent course for you is to keep apart, and be always cheerful, and welcome him with a smile — and — have you read 'The Way to Keep Him?'"

"No, Mr. Triplet," said Mabel, firmly, "I cannot feign. Were I to attempt talent and deceit, I should be weaker than I am now. Honesty and right are all my strength. I will cry to her for justice and mercy. And if I cry in vain, I shall die, Mr. Triplet, that is all."

"Don't cry, dear lady," said Triplet, in a broken voice.

"It is impossible!" cried she, suddenly. "I am not learned, but I can read faces. I always could, and so could my Aunt Deborah before me. I read you right, Mr. Triplet, and I have read her too. Did not my heart warm to her amongst them all? There *is* a heart at the bottom of all her acting, and that heart is good and noble."

"She is, madam! she is! and charitable too. I know a family she saved from starvation and despair. Oh, yes! she has a heart — to feel for the *poor* at all events."

"And am I not the poorest of the poor?" cried Mrs. Vane. "I have no father nor mother, Mr. Triplet; my husband is all I have in the world — all I *had*, I mean."

Triplet, deeply affected himself, stole a look at Mrs. Woffington. She was pale; but her face was composed into a sort of dogged obstinacy. He was disgusted with her. "Madam," said he, sternly, "there is a wild beast more cruel and savage than wolves and bears; it is called 'a rival,' and don't you get in its way."

At this moment, in spite of Triplet's precaution, Mrs. Vane, casting her eye accidentally round, caught sight of the picture, and instantly started up, crying: "She is there!" Triplet was thunderstruck. "What a likeness!" cried she, and moved towards the supposed picture.

"Don't go to it!" cried Triplet, aghast; "the color is wet."

She stopped; but her eye, and her very soul, dwelt upon the supposed picture; and Triplet stood quaking. "How like! It seems to breathe. You are a great painter, sir. A glass is not truer."

Triplet, hardly knowing what he said, muttered something about "critics, and lights and shades."

"Then they are blind!" cried Mabel, never for a moment removing her eye from the object. "Tell me

not of lights and shades. The pictures I see have a look of paint; but yours looks like life. Oh! that she were here, as this *wonderful* image of hers is. I would speak to her. I am not wise or learned; but orators never pleaded as I would plead to her for my Ernest's heart." Still her eye glanced upon the picture; and, I suppose, her heart realized an actual presence, though her judgment did not, for by some irresistible impulse she sank slowly down and stretched her clasped hands towards it, while sobs and words seemed to break direct from her bursting heart. "Oh, yes! you are beautiful, you are gifted, and the eyes of thousands wait upon your every word and look. What wonder that he, ardent, refined, and genial, should lay his heart at your feet? And I have nothing but my love to make him love me. I cannot take him from you. Oh, be generous to the weak! oh, give him back to me! What is one heart more to you? You are so rich, and I am so poor, that without his love I have nothing, and can do nothing but sit me down and cry till my heart breaks. Give him back to me, beautiful, terrible woman! for, with all your gifts, you cannot love him as his poor Mabel does; and I will love you longer perhaps than men can love. I will kiss your feet, and Heaven above will bless you; and I will bless you and pray for you to my dying day. Ah! it is alive! I am frightened! I am frightened!" She ran to Triplet, and seized his arm. "No!" cried she, quivering close to him; "I'm not frightened, for it was for me she — O Mrs. Woffington!" and hiding her face on Mr. Triplet's shoulder, she blushed, and wept, and trembled.

What was it had betrayed Mrs. Woffington? *A tear!*

During the whole of this interview (which had taken a turn so unlooked for by the listener) she might have said with Beatrice, "What fire is in mine ears?" and

what self-reproach and chill misgiving in her heart too. She had passed through a hundred emotions, as the young innocent wife told her sad and simple story. But anxious now above all things to escape without being recognized — for she had long repented having listened at all, or placed herself in her present position, she fiercely mastered her countenance; but though she ruled her features, she could not rule her heart. And when the young wife, instead of inveighing against her, came to her as a supplicant, with faith in her goodness, and sobbed to her for pity, a big tear rolled down her cheek, and proved her something more than a picture or an actress.

Mrs. Vane, as we have related, screamed and ran to Triplet.

Mrs. Woffington came instantly from her frame, and stood before them in a despairing attitude, with one hand upon her brow. For a single moment her impulse was to fly from the apartment, so ashamed was she of having listened, and of meeting her rival in this way; but she conquered this feeling, and as soon as she saw Mrs. Vane too had recovered some composure she said to Triplet, in a low but firm voice:

"Leave us, sir. No living creature must hear what I say to this lady!"

Triplet remonstrated, but Mrs. Vane said, faintly:

"Oh, yes, good Mr. Triplet, I would rather you left me."

Triplet, full of misgivings, was obliged to retire.

"Be composed, ladies," said he, piteously. "Neither of you could help it;" and so he entered his inner room, where he sat and listened nervously, for he could not shake off all apprehension of a personal encounter.

In the room he had left, there was a long uneasy silence. Both ladies were greatly embarrassed. It was the actress who spoke first. All trace of emotion, except

a certain pallor, was driven from her face. She spoke with very marked courtesy, but in tones that seemed to freeze as they dropped one by one from her mouth.

"I trust, madam, you will do me the justice to believe I did not know Mr. Vane was married?"

"I am sure of it!" said Mabel warmly. "I feel you are as good as you are gifted."

"Mrs. Vane, I am not!" said the other, almost sternly. "You are deceived!"

"Then Heaven have mercy on me! No! I am not deceived, you pitied me. You speak coldly now; but I know your face and your heart — you pity me!"

"I do respect, admire, and pity you," said Mrs. Woffington, sadly; "and I could consent never more to communicate with your — with Mr. Vane."

"Ah!" cried Mabel; "Heaven will bless you! But will you give me back his heart?"

"How can I do that?" said Mrs. Woffington, uneasily; she had not bargained for this.

"The magnet can repel as well as attract. Can you not break your own spell? What will his presence be to me, if his heart remain behind?"

"You ask much of me."

"Alas! I do."

"But I could do even this." She paused for breath. "And perhaps if you, who have not only touched my heart, but won my respect, were to say to me 'Do so,' I should do it." Again she paused, and spoke with difficulty; for the bitter struggle took away her breath. "Mr. Vane thinks better of me than I deserve. I have — only — to make him believe me — worthless — worse than I am — and he will drop me like an adder — and love you better, far better — for having known — admired — and despised Margaret Woffington."

"Oh!" cried Mabel, "I shall bless you every hour of

my life." Her countenance brightened into rapture at the picture, and Mrs. Woffington's darkened with bitterness as she watched her.

But Mabel reflected. "Rob you of your good name?" said this pure creature. "Ah, Mabel Vane! you think but of yourself."

"I thank you, madam," said Mrs. Woffington, a little touched by this unexpected trait; "but some one must suffer here, and" —

Mabel Vane interrupted her. "This would be cruel and base," said she, firmly, "no woman's forehead shall be soiled by me. O madam! beauty is admired, talent is adored; but virtue is a woman's crown. With it, the poor are rich: without it, the rich are poor. It walks through life upright, and never hides its head for high or low."

Her face was as the face of an angel now; and the actress, conquered by her beauty and her goodness, actually bowed her head and gently kissed the hand of the country wife whom she had quizzed a few hours ago.

Frailty paid this homage to virtue!

Mabel Vane hardly noticed it; her eye was lifted to heaven, and her heart was gone there for help in a sore struggle.

"This would be to assassinate you; no less. And so, madam," she sighed, "with God's help, I do refuse your offer; choosing rather, if needs be, to live desolate, but innocent — many a better than I hath lived so — ay! if God wills it, to die, with my hopes and my heart crushed, but my hands unstained; for so my humble life has passed."

How beautiful, great and pure goodness is! It paints heaven on the face that has it; it wakens the sleeping souls that meet it.

At the bottom of Margaret Woffington's heart lay a

soul, unknown to the world, scarce known to herself — a heavenly harp, on which ill airs of passion had been played — but still it was there, in tune with all that is true, pure, really great and good. And now the flush that a great heart sends to the brow, to herald great actions, came to her cheek and brow.

"Humble!" she cried. "Such as you are the diamonds of our race. You angel of truth and goodness, you have conquered!"

"Oh, yes! yes! Thank God, yes!"

"What a fiend I must be, could I injure you! The poor heart we have both overrated shall be yours again, and yours forever. In my hands it is painted glass; in the lustre of a love like yours it may become a priceless jewel." She turned her head away and pondered a moment, then suddenly offered to Mrs. Vane her hand with nobleness and majesty; "Can you trust me?" The actress too was divinely beautiful now, for her good angel shone through her.

"I could trust you with my life!" was the reply.

"Ah! if I might call you friend, dear lady, what would I not do — suffer — resign — to be worthy that title!"

"No, not friend!" cried the warm, innocent Mabel; "sister! I will call you sister. I have no sister."

"Sister!" said Mrs. Woffington. "Oh, do not mock me! Alas! you do not know what you say. That sacred name to me, from lips so pure as yours — Mrs. Vane," said she, timidly, "would you think me presumptuous if I begged you to — to let me kiss you?"

The words were scarce spoken before Mrs. Vane's arms were wreathed round her neck, and that innocent cheek laid sweetly to hers.

Mrs. Woffington strained her to her bosom, and two great hearts, whose grandeur the world, worshipper of

charlatans, never discovered, had found each other out and beat against each other. A great heart is as quick to find another out as the world is slow.

Mrs. Woffington burst into a passion of tears and clasped Mabel tighter and tighter, in a half-despairing way. Mabel mistook the cause, but she kissed her tears away.

"Dear sister," said she, "be comforted. I love you. My heart warmed to you the first moment I saw you. A woman's love and gratitude are something. Ah! you will never find me change. This is for life, look you."

"God grant it!" cried the other poor woman. "Oh, it is not that, it is not that; it is because I am so little worthy of this. It is a sin to deceive you. I am not good like you. You do not know me!"

"You do not know yourself if you say so!" cried Mabel; and to her hearer the words seemed to come from heaven. "I read faces," said Mabel. "I read yours at sight, and you are what I set you down; and nobody must breathe a word against you, not even yourself. Do you think I am blind? You are beautiful, you are good, you are my sister, and I love you!"

"Heaven forgive me!" thought the other. "How can I resign this angel's good opinion? Surely Heaven sends this blessed dew to my parched heart!" And now she burned to make good her promise, and earn this virtuous wife's love. She folded her once more in her arms, and then taking her by the hand, led her tenderly into Triplet's inner room. She made her lie down on the bed, and placed pillows high for her like a mother, and leaned over her as she lay, and pressed her lips gently to her forehead. Her fertile brain had already digested a plan, but she had resolved that this pure and candid soul should take no lessons of deceit. "Lie there," said she, "till I open the door, and then

join us. Do you know what I am going to do? I am not going to restore you your husband's heart, but to show you it never really left you. You read faces; well, I read circumstances. Matters are not as you thought," said she, with all a woman's tact. "I cannot explain, but you will see." She then gave Mrs. Triplet peremptory orders not to let her charge rise from the bed until the preconcerted signal.

Mrs. Vane was, in fact, so exhausted by all she had gone through, that she was in no condition to resist. She cast a look of childlike confidence upon her rival, and then closed her eyes, and tried not to tremble all over and listen like a frightened hare.

It is one great characteristic of genius to do great things with little things. Paxton could see that so small a matter as a green-house could be dilated into a crystal palace, and with two common materials — glass and iron — he raised the palace of the genii; the brightest idea and the noblest ornament added to Europe in this century, — the koh-i-nor of the west. Livy's definition of Archimedes goes on the same ground.

Peg Woffington was a genius in her way. On entering Triplet's studio her eye fell upon three trifles — Mrs. Vane's hood and mantle, the back of an old letter, and Mr. Triplet. (It will be seen how she worked these slight materials.) On the letter was written, in pencil, simply these two words, "Mabel Vane." Mrs. Woffington wrote above these words two more, "Alone and unprotected." She put this into Mr. Triplet's hand, and bade him take it down stairs and give it Sir Charles Pomander, whose retreat, she knew, must have been fictitious. "You will find him round the corner," said she, "or in some shop that looks this way." Whilst uttering these words she had put on Mrs. Vane's hood and mantle.

No answer was returned, and no Triplet went out of the door.

She turned, and there he was kneeling on both knees close under her.

"Bid me jump out of that window, madam; bid me kill those two gentlemen, and I will not rebel. You are a great lady, a talented lady; you have been insulted, and no doubt blood will flow. It ought — it is your due; but that innocent lady, do not compromise her!"

"O Mr. Triplet, you need not kneel to me. I do not wish to force you to render me a service. I have no right to dictate to you."

"Oh, dear!" cried Triplet, "don't talk in that way. I owe you my life, but I think of your own peace of mind, for you are not one to be happy if you injure the innocent!" He rose suddenly, and cried: "Madam, promise me not to stir till I come back!"

"Where are you going?"

"To bring the husband to his wife's feet, and so save one angel from despair, and another angel from a great crime."

"Well, I suppose you are wiser than I," said she. "But if you are in earnest, you had better be quick, for somehow I am rather changeable about these people."

"You can't help that, madam, it is your sex; you are an angel. May I be permitted to kiss your hand? you are all goodness and gentleness at bottom. I fly to Mr. Vane, and we will be back before you have time to repent, and give the devil the upper hand again, my dear, good, sweet lady!"

Away flew Triplet, all unconscious that he was not Mrs. Woffington's opponent, but puppet. He ran, he tore, animated by a good action, and spurred by the notion that he was in direct competition with the fiend for the possession of his benefactress.

He had no sooner turned the corner, than Mrs. Woffington looking out of the window observed Sir Charles Pomander on the watch, as she had expected. She remained at the window with Mrs. Vane's hood on, until Sir Charles's eye in its wanderings lighted on her, and then dropping Mrs. Vane's letter from the window she hastily withdrew.

Sir Charles eagerly picked it up. His eye brightened when he read the short contents. With a self-satisfied smile he mounted the stair. He found in Triplet's house a lady, who seemed startled at her late hardihood. She sat with her back to the door, her hood drawn tightly down, and wore an air of trembling consciousness. Sir Charles smiled again. He knew the sex, at least he said so. (It is an assertion often ventured upon.) Accordingly Sir Charles determined to come down from his height and court nature and innocence in their own tones. This he rightly judged must be the proper course to take with Mrs. Vane. He fell down with mock ardor upon one knee.

The supposed Mrs. Vane gave a little squeak.

"Dear Mrs. Vane," cried he, "be not alarmed; loveliness neglected, and simplicity deceived, insure respect as well as adoration. Ah!" (a sigh.)

"Oh, get up, sir; do, please. Ah!" (a sigh.)

"You sigh, sweetest of human creatures. Ah! why did not a nature like yours fall into hands that would have cherished it as it deserves? Had Heaven bestowed on me this hand, which I take" —

"Oh, please, sir" —

"With the profoundest respect, would I have abandoned such a treasure for an actress? — a Woffington! as artificial and hollow a jade as ever winked at a side box!"

"Is she, sir?"

"Notorious, madam. Your husband is the only man in London who does not see through her. How different are you! Even I, who have no taste for actresses, found myself revived, refreshed, ameliorated by that engaging picture of innocence and virtue you drew this morning; yourself the bright and central figure. Ah, dear angel! I remember all your favorites, and envy them their place in your recollections. Your Barbary mare" —

"Hen, sir!"

"Of course I meant hen; and Gray Gillian, his old nurse" —

"No, no, no! she is the mare, sir. He! he! he!"

"So she is. And Dame — Dame" —

"Best!"

"Ah! I knew it. You see how I remember them all. And all carry me back to those innocent days which fleet too soon — days when an angel like you might have weaned me from the wicked pleasures of the town, to the placid delights of a rural existence!"

"Alas, sir!"

"You sigh. It is not yet too late. I am a convert to you; I swear it on this white hand. Ah! how can I relinquish it, pretty fluttering prisoner?"

"O sir, please" —

"Stay awhile."

"No; please, sir" —

"While I fetter thee with a worthy manacle." Sir Charles slipped a diamond ring of great value upon his pretty prisoner.

"La, sir, how pretty!" cried innocence.

Sir Charles then undertook to prove that the lustre of the ring was faint, compared with that of the present wearer's eyes. This did not suit innocence; she hung her head and fluttered, and showed a bashful repugnance to look her admirer in the face. Sir Charles playfully

insisted, and Mrs. Woffington was beginning to be a little at a loss, when suddenly voices were heard upon the stairs.

"*My husband!*" cried the false Mrs. Vane, and in a moment she rose, and darted into Triplet's inner apartment.

Mr. Vane and Mr. Triplet were talking earnestly as they came up the stair. It seems the wise Triplet had prepared a little dramatic scene for his own refreshment, as well as for the ultimate benefit of all parties. He had persuaded Mr. Vane to accompany him by warm, mysterious promises of a happy *dénoûment;* and now, having conducted that gentleman as far as his door, he was heard to say, —

"And now, sir, you shall see one who waits to forget grief, suspicion, — all, in your arms. Behold!" and here he flung the door open.

"The devil!"

"You flatter me," said Pomander, who had had time to recover his *aplomb*, somewhat shaken, at first, by Mr. Vane's inopportune arrival.

Now it is to be observed that Mr. Vane had not long ago seen his wife lying on her bed, to all appearance incapable of motion.

Mr. Vane, before Triplet could recover his surprise, inquired of Pomander why he had sent for him. "And what," added he, "is the grief, suspicion, I am, according to Mr. Triplet, to forget in your arms?"

Mr. Vane added this last sentence in rather a testy manner.

"Why, the fact is," began Sir Charles, without the remotest idea of what the fact was going to be.

"That Sir Charles Pomander" — interrupted Triplet.

"But Mr. Triplet is going to explain," said Sir Charles, keenly.

"Nay, sir; be yours the pleasing duty. But now I think of it," resumed Triplet, "why not tell the simple truth? it is not a play. She I brought you here to see was not Sir Charles Pomander; but" —

"I forbid you to complete the name!" cried Pomander.

"I command you to complete the name!" cried Vane.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen! how can I do both?" remonstrated Triplet.

"Enough, sir!" cried Pomander. "It is a lady's secret. I am the guardian of that lady's honor."

"She has chosen a strange guardian of her honor!" said Vane, bitterly.

"Gentlemen!" cried poor Triplet, who did not at all like the turn things were taking, "I give you my word, she does not even know of Sir Charles's presence here!"

"Who?" cried Vane, furiously. "Man alive! who are you speaking of?"

"Mrs. Vane."

"My wife!" cried Vane, trembling with anger and jealousy. "She here! — and with this man?"

"No!" cried Triplet. "With me, with me! Not with him, of course."

"Boaster!" cried Vane, contemptuously. "But that is a part of your profession."

Pomander, irritated, scornfully drew from his pocket the ladies' joint production, which had fallen at his feet from Mrs. Woffington's hand. He presented this to Mr. Vane, who took it very uneasily; a mist swam before his eyes as he read the words: "Alone and unprotected — Mabel Vane." He had no sooner read these words than he found he loved his wife; when he tampered with his treasure, he did not calculate on another seeking it.

This was Pomander's hour of triumph. He proceeded coolly to explain to Mr. Vane, that Mrs. Woffington having deserted him for Mr. Vane, and Mr. Vane his

wife for Mrs. Woffington, the bereaved parties had, according to custom, agreed to console each other.

This soothing little speech was interrupted by Mr. Vane's sword flashing suddenly out of its sheath; while that gentleman, white with rage and jealousy, bade him instantly take to his guard, or be run through the body like some noxious animal.

Sir Charles drew his sword, and in spite of Triplet's weak interference, half a dozen passes were rapidly exchanged, when suddenly the door of the inner room opened, and a lady in a hood pronounced, in a voice which was an excellent imitation of Mrs. Vane's, the word, "False!"

The combatants lowered their points.

"You hear, sir!" cried Triplet.

"You see, sir!" said Pomander.

"Mabel! wife!" cried Mr. Vane, in agony. "Oh, say this is not true! oh, say that letter is a forgery! Say, at least, it was by some treachery you were lured to this den of iniquity! Oh! speak!"

The lady silently beckoned to some person inside.

"You know I loved you! you know how bitterly I repent the infatuation that brought me to the feet of another!"

The lady replied not, though Vane's soul appeared to hang upon her answer. But she threw the door open, and there appeared another lady, the real Mrs. Vane! Mrs. Woffington then threw off her hood, and to Sir Charles Pomander's consternation, revealed the features of that ingenious person, who seemed born to outwit him.

"You heard that fervent declaration, madam?" said she to Mrs. Vane. "I present to you, madam, a gentleman, who regrets that he mistook the real direction of his feelings. And to you, sir," continued she, with great

dignity, "I present a lady who will never mistake either her feelings or her duty."

"Ernest, dear Ernest!" cried Mrs. Vane, blushing, as if she was the culprit. And she came forward, all love and tenderness.

Her truant husband kneeled at her feet, of course. "No!" he said, rather sternly. "How came you here, Mabel?"

"Mrs. Vane," said the actress, "fancied you had mislaid that weather-cock, your heart, in Covent Garden, and that an actress had seen in it a fit companion for her own, and had feloniously appropriated it. She came to me to inquire after it."

"But this letter, signed by you?" said Vane, still addressing Mabel.

"Was written by me on a paper which accidentally contained Mrs. Vane's name. The fact is, Mr. Vane, I can hardly look you in the face. I had a little wager with Sir Charles, here; his diamond ring, which you may see has become my diamond ring" — a horrible wry face from Sir Charles — "against my left glove, that I could bewitch a country gentleman's imagination, and make him think me an angel. Unfortunately, the owner of his heart appeared, and, like poor Mr. Vane, took our play for earnest. It became necessary to disabuse her and to open your eyes. Have I done so?"

"You have, madam," said Vane, wincing at each word she said. But at last, by a mighty effort, he mastered himself, and coming to Mrs. Woffington with a quivering lip, he held out his hand suddenly in a very manly way. "I have been the dupe of my own vanity," said he, "and I thank you for this lesson." Poor Mrs. Woffington's fortitude had well-nigh left her at this.

"Mabel," he cried, "is this humiliation any punishment for my folly? any guarantee for my repentance? Can you forgive me?"

"It is all forgiven, Ernest. But, oh! you are mistaken." She glided to Mrs. Woffington. "What do we not owe you, sister?" whispered she.

"Nothing: that word pays all," was the reply. She then slipped her address into Mrs. Vane's hand, and, courtesying to all the company, she hastily left the room.

Sir Charles Pomander followed; but he was not quick enough; she got a start, and purposely avoided him, and for three days neither the public nor private friends saw this poor woman's face.

Mr. and Mrs. Vane prepared to go also; but Mrs. Vane would thank good Mr. Triplet and Mrs. Triplet for their kindness to her.

Triplet the benevolent blushed, was confused and delighted, but suddenly turning somewhat sorrowful, he said, "Mr. Vane, madam, made use of an expression which caused a momentary pang. He called this a den of iniquity. Now this is my studio! But never mind."

Mr. Vane asked his pardon for so absurd an error, and the pair left Triplet in all the enjoyment which does come now and then to an honest man, whether this dirty little world will or not.

A coach was called, and they went home to Bloomsbury. Few words were said, but the repentant husband often silently pressed this angel to his bosom; and the tears which found their way to her beautiful eyelashes were tears of joy.

This weakish, and consequently villanous, though not ill-disposed, person, would have gone down to Willoughby that night, but his wife had great good sense. She would not take her husband off, like a schoolboy caught out of bounds. She begged him to stay while she made certain purchases; but for all that her heart burned to be at home. So in less than a week after the events we have related, they left London.

Meantime, every day Mrs. Vane paid a quiet visit to Mrs. Woffington (for some days the actress admitted no other visitor), and was with her but two hours before she left London. On that occasion she found her very sad.

"I shall never see you again in this world," said she, "but I beg of you to write to me, that my mind may be in contact with yours."

She then asked Mabel, in her half-sorrowful, half-bitter way, how many months it would be ere she was forgotten.

Mabel answered by quietly crying. So then they embraced; and Mabel assured her friend she was not one of those who change their minds. "It is for life, dear sister; it is for life," cried she.

"Swear this to me," said the other almost sternly. "But no. I have more confidence in that candid face and pure nature than in a human being's oath. If you are happy, remember you owe me something. If you are unhappy, come to me, and I will love you as men cannot love."

Then vows passed between them, for a singular tie bound those two women; and then the actress showed a part at least of her sore heart to her new sister; and that sister was surprised and grieved, and pitied her truly and deeply, and they wept on each other's neck; and at last they were fain to part. They parted; and true it was, they never met again in this world. They parted in sorrow; but when they meet again, it shall be with joy.

Women are generally such faithless, unscrupulous, and pitiless humbugs in their dealings with their own sex, which, whatever they may say, they despise at heart, that I am happy to be able to say Mrs. Vane proved true as steel. She was a noble-minded, simple

minded creature: she was also a constant creature. Constancy is a rare, a beautiful, a God-like virtue.

Four times every year she wrote a long letter to Mrs. Woffington, and twice a year, in the cold weather, she sent her a hamper of country delicacies that would have victualled a small garrison. And when her sister left this earthly scene — a humble, pious, long-repentant Christian — Mrs. Vane wore mourning for her, and sorrowed over her, but not as those who cannot hope to meet again.

My story as a work of art — good, bad, or indifferent — ends with that last sentence. If a reader accompanies me farther, I shall feel flattered, and he does so at his own risk.

My reader knows that all this befell long ago; that Woffington is gay, and Triplet sad no more; that Mabel's, and all the bright eyes of that day, have long been dim, and all its cunning voices hushed. Judge, then, whether I am one of those happy story-tellers who can end with a wedding. No! this story must wind up, as yours and mine must — to-morrow — or to-morrow — or to-morrow! when our little sand is run.

Sir Charles Pomander lived a man of pleasure until sixty: he then became a man of pain. He dragged the chain about eight years, and died miserably.

Mr. Cibber not so much died as "slipped his wind," — a nautical expression that conveys the idea of an easy exit. He went off quiet and genteel. He was past eighty, and had lived fast. His servant called him at seven in the morning. "I will shave at eight," said Mr. Cibber. John brought the hot water at eight; but his master had taken advantage of this interval in his toilet, to die! — to avoid shaving?

Snarl and Soaper conducted the criticism of their

day with credit and respectability until a good old age, and died placidly a natural death like twaddle, sweet or sour.

The Triplets, while their patroness lived, did pretty well. She got a tragedy of his accepted at her theatre. She made him send her a copy, and with her scissors cut out about half; sometimes thinning, sometimes cutting bodily away. But lo! the inherent vanity of Mr. Triplet came out strong. Submissively, but obstinately, he fought for the discarded beauties. Unluckily, he did this one day that his patroness was in one of her bitter humors; so she instantly gave him back his manuscript, with a sweet smile owned herself inferior in judgment to him, and left him unmolested.

Triplet breathed freely: a weight was taken off him. The savage steel (he applied this title to the actress's scissors) had spared his *purpurei panni.* He was played, pure and intact, — a calamity the rest of us grumbling escape.

But it did so happen that the audience were of the actress's mind, and found the words too exuberant, and the business of the play too scanty in proportion. At last their patience was so sorely tried that they supplied one striking incident to a piece deficient in facts. They gave the manager the usual broad hint, and in the middle of Triplet's third act a huge veil of green baize descended upon "The Jealous Spaniard."

Failing here, Mrs. Woffington contrived often to befriend him in his other arts, and moreover she often sent Mr. Triplet what she called a snug investment, a loan of ten pounds, to be repaid at Doomsday, with interest and compound interest, according to the Scriptures; and although she laughed, she secretly believed she was to get her ten pounds back, double and treble. And I believe so too.

Some years later Mrs. Triplet became eventful. She fell ill, and lay a-dying; but one fine morning, after all hope had been given up, she suddenly rose and dressed herself. She was quite well in body now, but insane.

She continued in this state a month, and then by God's mercy she recovered her reason; but now the disease fell another step, and lighted upon her temper, — a more athletic vixen was not to be found. She had spoiled Triplet for this by being too tame, so when the dispensation came they sparred daily. They were now thoroughly unhappy. They were poor as ever, and their benefactress was dead, and they had learned to snap. A speculative tour had taken this pair to Bristol, then the second city in England. They sojourned in the suburbs.

One morning the postman brought a letter for Triplet, who was showing his landlord's boy how to plant onions. (N.B. Triplet had never planted an onion, but he was one of your *a priori* gentlemen, and could show anybody how to do anything.) Triplet held out his hand for the letter, but the postman held out his hand for half-a-crown first. Trip's profession had transpired, and his clothes inspired diffidence. Triplet appealed to his good feeling.

He replied with exultation, "That he had none left." (A middle-aged postman, no doubt.)

Triplet then suddenly started from entreaty to King Cambyses' vein. In vain!

Mrs. Triplet came down, and essayed the blandishments of the softer sex. In vain! And as there were no assets, the postman marched off down the road.

Mrs. Triplet glided after him like an assassin, beckoning on Triplet, who followed, doubtful of her designs. Suddenly (truth compels me to relate this) she seized the

obdurate official from behind, pinned both his arms to his side, and with her nose furiously telegraphed her husband.

He, animated by her example, plunged upon the man and tore the letter from his hand, and opened it before his eyes.

It happened to be a very windy morning, and when he opened the letter an enclosure, printed on much finer paper, was caught into the air, and went down the wind. Triplet followed in kangaroo leaps, like a dancer making a flying exit.

The postman cried on all good citizens for help. Some collected and laughed at him; Mrs. Triplet explaining that they were poor, and could not pay half-a-crown for the freight of half an ounce of paper. She held him convulsively until Triplet reappeared.

That gentleman on his return was ostentatiously calm and dignified. "You are, or were, in perturbation about half-a-crown," said he. "There, sir, is a twenty-pound note: oblige me with nineteen pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence. Should your resources be unequal to such a demand, meet me at the 'Green Cat and Brown Frogs,' after dinner, when you shall receive your half-crown, and drink another upon the occasion of my sudden accession to unbounded affluence."

The postman was staggered by the sentence, and overawed by the note, and chose the "Cat and Frogs," and liquid half-crown.

Triplet took his wife down the road and showed her the letter and enclosure. The letter ran thus: —

Sir, — We beg respectfully to inform you that our late friend and client, James Triplet, Merchant, of the Minories, died last August, without a will, and that you are his heir.

His property amounts to about twenty thousand pounds, besides some reversions. Having possessed the confidence of

your late uncle, we should feel honored and gratified if you should think us worthy to act professionally for yourself.

We enclose twenty pounds, and beg you will draw upon us as far as five thousand pounds, should you have immediate occasion.

We are, sir,
Your humble servants,
JAMES AND JOHN ALLMITT.

It was some time, before these children of misfortune could realize this enormous stroke of compensation; but, at last, it worked its way into their spirits, and they began to sing, to triumph, and dance upon the king's highway.

Mrs. Triplet was the first to pause, and take better views. "O James!" she cried, "we have suffered much! we have been poor, but honest, and the Almighty has looked upon us at last!"

Then they began to reproach themselves.

"O James! I have been a peevish woman — an ill wife to you, this many years!"

"No, no!" cried Triplet, with tears in his eyes. "It is I who have been rough and brutal. Poverty tried us too hard; but we were not like the rest of them — we were always faithful to the altar. And the Almighty has seen us, though we often doubted it."

"I never doubted that, James."

So then the poor things fell on their knees upon the public road, and thanked God. If any man had seen them, he would have said they were mad. Yet madder things are done every day, by gentlemen with faces as grave as the parish bull's. And then they rose, and formed their little plans.

Triplet was for devoting four-fifths to charity, and living like a prince on the remainder. But Mrs. Triplet thought the poor were entitled to no more than two-

thirds, and they themselves ought to bask in a third, to make up for what they had gone through; and then suddenly she sighed, and burst into tears. "Lucy! Lucy!" sobbed she.

Yes, reader, God had taken little Lucy! And her mother cried to think all this wealth and comfort had come too late for her darling child.

"Do not cry. Lucy is richer, a thousand times, than you are, with your twenty thousand pounds."

Their good resolutions were carried out, for a wonder. Triplet lived for years, the benefactor of all the loose fish that swim in and round theatres; and indeed the unfortunate seldom appealed to him in vain. He now predominated over the arts, instead of climbing them. In his latter day, he became an oracle, as far as the science of acting was concerned; and, what is far more rare, he really got to know *something* about it. This was owing to two circumstances: first, he ceased to run blindfold in a groove behind the scenes; second, he became a frequenter of the first row of the pit, and that is where the whole critic, and two-thirds of the true actor, is made.

On one point, to his dying day, his feelings guided his judgment. He never could see an actress equal to his Woffington. Mrs. Abington was grace personified, but so was Woffington, said the old man. And Abington's voice is thin, Woffington's was sweet and mellow. When Jordan rose, with her voice of honey, her dewy freshness, and her heavenly laugh, that melted in along with her words, like the gold in the quartz, Triplet was obliged to own her the goddess of beautiful gayety: but still he had the last word: "Woffington was all *she* is, except her figure. Woffington was a Hebe — your Nell Jordan is little better than a dowdy."

Triplet almost reached the present century. He passed

through great events, but they did not excite him; his eye was upon the arts. When Napoleon drew his conquering sword on England, Triplet's remark was: "Now we shall be driven upon native talent, thank Heaven!" The storms of Europe shook not Triplet. The fact is, nothing that happened on the great stage of the world seemed real to him. He believed in nothing, where there was no curtain visible. But even the grotesque are not good in vain. Many an eye was wet round his dying bed, and many a tear fell upon his grave. He made his final exit in the year of grace 1799. And I, who laugh at him, would leave this world to-day, to be with him; for I am tossing at sea — he is in port.

A straightforward character like Mabel's becomes a firm character with years. Long ere she was forty, her hand gently but steadily ruled Willoughby House — and all in it. She and Mr. Vane lived very happily; he gave her no fresh cause for uneasiness. Six months after their return, she told him what burned in that honest heart of hers, the truth about Mrs. Woffington. The water rushed to his eyes, but his heart was now wholly his wife's; and gratitude to Mrs. Woffington for her noble conduct, was the only sentiment awakened.

"You must repay her, dearest," said he. "I know you love her, and until to-day it gave me pain; now it gives me pleasure. We owe her much."

The happy innocent life of Mabel Vane is soon summed up. Frank as the day, constant as the sun, pure as the dew, she passed the golden years preparing herself and others for a still brighter eternity. At home, it was she who warmed and cheered the house, and the hearth, more than all the Christmas fires. Abroad, she shone upon the poor like the sun. She led her beloved husband by the hand to heaven. She led her children the same road;

and she was leading her grandchildren when the angel of death came for her, and she slept in peace.

Many remember her. For she alone, of all our tale, lived in this present century; but they speak of her as "old Madam Vane," her whom we knew so young and fresh.

She lies in Willoughby Church—her mortal part; her spirit is with the spirits of our mothers and sisters, reader, that are gone before us; with the tender mothers, the chaste wives, the loyal friends, and the just women of all ages. RESURGET.

I come to her last, who went first; but I could not have stayed by the others, when once I had laid my darling asleep. It seemed for awhile as if the events of our tale did her harm; but it was not so in the end.

Not many years afterwards, she was engaged by Mr. Sheridan, at a very heavy salary, and went to Dublin. Here the little girl, who had often carried a pitcher on her head down to the Liffey, and had played Polly Peachum in a booth, became a lion; dramatic, political, and literary, and the centre of the wit of that wittiest of cities.

But the Dublin ladies and she did not coalesce. They said she was a naughty woman, and not fit for them morally. She said they had but two topics, "silks and scandal," and were unfit for her intellectually.

This was the saddest part of her history. But it is darkest just before sunrise. She returned to London. Not long after, it so happened, that she went to a small church in the city one Sunday afternoon. The preacher was such as we have often heard; but not so this poor woman, in her day of sapless theology, ere John Wesley waked the snoring church. Instead of sending a dry clatter of morality about their ears, or evaporating the

Bible in the thin generalities of the pulpit, this man drove God's truths home to the hearts of men and women. In his hands the divine virtues were thunderbolts, not swans' down. With good sense, plain speaking, and a heart yearning for the souls of his brethren and his sisters, he stormed the bosoms of many; and this afternoon, as he reasoned like Paul of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, sinners trembled — and Margaret Woffington was of those who trembled.

After this day, she came ever to the narrow street where shone this house of God; and still, new light burst upon her heart and conscience. Here she learned why she was unhappy; here she learned how alone she could be happy; here she learned to know herself; and the moment she knew herself, she abhorred herself, and repented in dust and ashes.

This strong and straightforward character made no attempt to reconcile two things that an average Christian would have continued to reconcile. Her interest fell in a moment before her new sense of right. She flung her profession from her like a poisonous weed.

Long before this Mrs. Vane had begged her to leave the stage. She had replied that it was to her what wine is to weak stomachs. "But," added she, "do not fear that I will ever crawl down-hill, and unravel my own reputation; nor will I ever do as I have seen others — stand groaning at the wing, to go on giggling, and come off gasping. No! the first night the boards do not spring beneath my feet, and the pulse of the public beat under my hand, I am gone. Next day, at rehearsal, instead of Woffington, a note will come, to tell the manager that henceforth Woffington is herself — at Twickenham, or Richmond, or Harrow-on-the-Hill — far from his dust, his din, and his glare — quiet, till God takes her: amidst grass and flowers and charitable deeds."

This day had not come; it was in the zenith of her charms and her fame, that she went home one night, after a play, and never entered a theatre, by front door or back door, again. She declined all leave-taking and ceremony.

"When a publican shuts up shop and ceases to diffuse liquid poison, he does not invite the world to put up the shutters; neither will I. Actors overrate themselves ridiculously," added she; "I am not of that importance to the world, nor the world to me. I fling away a dirty old glove instead of soiling my fingers filling it with more guineas, and the world loses in me, what? another old glove, full of words; half of them idle, the rest wicked, untrue, silly, or impure. *Rougissons, taisons-nous, et partons.*"

She now changed her residence, and withdrew politely from her old associates, courting two classes only, the good and the poor. She had always supported her mother and sister; but now charity became her system. The following is characteristic: —

A gentleman who had greatly admired this dashing actress, met one day, in the suburbs, a lady in an old black silk gown and a gray shawl, with a large basket on her arm. She showed him its contents — worsted stockings of prodigious thickness — which she was carrying to some of her *protégés*.

"But surely that is a waste of your valuable time," remonstrated her admirer. "Much better buy them."

"But, my good soul," replied the representative of Sir Harry Wildair, "you can't buy them. Nobody in this wretched town can knit worsted hose except Woffington."

Conversions like this are open to just suspicion, and some did not fail to confound her with certain great sinners, who have turned austere self-deceivers when sin smiled no more. But this was mere conjecture. The

facts were clear, and speaking to the contrary. This woman left folly at its brightest, and did not become austere; on the contrary, though she laughed less, she was observed to smile far oftener than before. She was a humble and penitent, but cheerful, hopeful Christian.

Another class of detractors took a somewhat opposite ground; they accused her of bigotry, for advising a young female friend against the stage as a business. But let us hear herself. This is what she said to the girl:—

"At the bottom of my heart, I always loved and honored virtue. Yet the tendencies of the stage so completely overcame my good sentiments, that I was for years a worthless woman. It is a situation of uncommon and incessant temptation. Ask yourself, my child, whether there is nothing else you can do but this. It is, I think, our duty and our wisdom to fly temptation whenever we can, as it is to resist it when we cannot escape it."

Was this the tone of bigotry?

Easy in fortune, penitent, but cheerful, Mrs. Woffington had now but one care; to efface the memory of her former self, and to give as many years to purity and piety, as had gone to folly and frailty. This was not to be. The Almighty did not permit, or perhaps I should say, did not require this.

Some unpleasant symptoms had long attracted her notice, but in the bustle of her profession had received little attention. She was now persuaded by her own medical attendant to consult Dr. Bowdler, who had a great reputation, and had been years ago an acquaintance and an admirer. He visited her, he examined her by means little used in that day, and he saw at once that her days were numbered.

Dr. Bowdler's profession and experience had not steeled his heart as they generally do and must do. He could

not tell her this sad news, so he asked her for pen and paper, and said, "I will write a prescription to Mr. ——." He then wrote, not a prescription, but a few lines, begging Mr. —— to convey the cruel intelligence by degrees, and with care and tenderness. "It is all we can do for her," said he.

He looked so grave while writing the supposed prescription, that it unluckily occurred to Mrs. Woffington to look over him. She stole archly behind him, and, with a smile on her face, read her death-warrant.

It was a cruel stroke. A gasping sigh broke from her. At this Dr. Bowdler looked up, and to his horror saw the sweet face he had doomed to the tomb looking earnestly and anxiously at him, and very pale and grave. He was shocked, and, strange to say, she, whose death-warrant he had signed, ran and brought him a glass of wine, for he was quite overcome. Then she gave him her hand in her own sweet way, and bade him not grieve for her, for she was not afraid to die, and had long learned that "life is a walking shadow, a poor, poor player, who frets and struts his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more."

But no sooner was the doctor gone, than she wept bitterly. Poor soul, she had set her heart upon living as many years to God as she had to the world, and she had hoped to wipe out her former self.

"Alas!" she said to her sister, "I have done more harm than I can ever hope to do good now; and my long life of folly and wickedness will be remembered, will be what they call famous; my short life of repentance, who will know, or heed, or take to profit?"

But she soon ceased to repine. She bowed to the will of Heaven, and set her house in order, and awaited her summons. The tranquillity of her life and her courageous spirit were unfavorable to the progress of disease, and I

am glad to say she was permitted to live nearly three years after this, and these three years were the happiest period of her whole life. Works of piety and love made the days eventful. She was at home now — she had never been at home in folly and loose living. All her bitterness was gone now, with its cause.

Reader, it was with her as it is with many an autumn day: clouds darken the sun, rain and wind sweep over all — till day declines. But then comes one heavenly hour, when all ill things seem spent. There is no more wind, no more rain. The great sun comes forth — not fiery bright, indeed, but full of tranquil glory, and warms the sky with ruby waves, and the hearts of men with hope, as, parting with us for a little space, he glides slowly and peacefully to rest.

So fared it with this humble, penitent, and now happy Christian.

A part of her desire was given her. She lived long enough to read a firm recantation of her former self, to show the world a great repentance, and to leave upon indelible record one more proof, what alone is true wisdom, and where alone true joys are to be found.

She endured some physical pain, as all must who die in their prime. But this never wrung a sigh from her great heart; and within she had the peace of God, which passes all understanding.

I am not strong enough to follow her to her last hour, nor is it needed; enough that her own words came true. When the great summons came, it found her full of hope and peace and joy; sojourning, not dwelling, upon earth, far from dust and din and vice; the Bible in her hand, the Cross in her heart; quiet, amidst grass and flowers and charitable deeds.

"NOM OMNEM MORITURAM."